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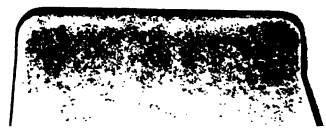

MAURICE DERING;

OR,

THE QUADRILATERAL.

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "GUY LIVINGSTONE."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

A FOUNDATION STONE 9

CHAPTER II.

THE TABAKO PARLEMENT 16

CHAPTER III.

AUNTS AND COUSINS 38

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE THE START 65

CHAPTER V.

A RACE FOR TWO LIVES 74

CHAPTER VI.

IDA CAREW'S PASSION 109

CHAPTER VII.

PUNISHMENT PARADE 130

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPORTING PARSON 145

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE

A LOSING HAZARD 155

CHAPTER X.

DESDICHADO 173

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST TEMPTATION 189

CHAPTER XII.

BENEDICTINE DAYS 210

CHAPTER XIII.

A SAFE INVESTMENT 220

CHAPTER XIV.

HONOUR THY FATHER 247

MAURICE DERING:

OR,

THE QUADRILATERAL.

CHAPTER I.

A FOUNDATION STONE.

At that shivered granite cross we seem to touch the point, where the collar-strain that has lasted for a long league shall cease. Our sturdy little team know it too, for they break of their own accord from the stubborn slouching jog that no yells or oaths could quicken, into a brisk imitation of a trot; a sharp swing round the hill-shoulder, and a couple of steep descents down which the diligence staggers, rolling like a ship with overmuch deck-load, bring us right into the dreary, grey bourg of Broons, where we, who travel eastward from St. Brieuc, must make our midday halt.

It is a real Finisterre day; glaring, yet gusty withal. No quiet outside under the swirling sign-bush, where ghastly beggars gather—clamorous or monotonously mournful; where half-a-dozen horsekeepers of both sexes are shouting intimidation at a refractory stallion, who is so evidently master of the position that he disdains to kick in earnest, and simply screams defiance. Not much of quiet in the low murky *salle*, where a score of hungry diners have backed themselves against time for forty sous even, and seem to be winning all the way.

A dozen yards from the inn door there is the tiniest shop-of-all-trades that I ever remember to have seen; just large enough to hold—besides its meek stock of wares—two ancient women, who sit there, I know, from dawn to twilight, prosing steadily on after the wont of Bretonne *commères;* softening down their pointless scandals with *Faut pas mentir*, and *Que sais-je, moi?* Emphasising every other sentence with a nod of those stiff snowy coifs, that would make worse and grimier faces look honest and cozy and clean. Though it is so very

diminutive, the nest of that pair of homely old owls looks comfortably quiet under the broad over-hang of tilework. I bethink me that my fusee box is match-less, and that I may as well, here, plenish it for the road; so entering I begin to chatter with the least rugged of the twain about the weather and the crops. These conversations are not dangerously interesting; you don't understand above one word in three, and what you do understand is not strictly remunerative; but the Breton means well, and departs with a placid consciousness of having amused or instructed the stranger.

While the dame was talking, I chanced to glance at a shelf whereon, evidently, the family ornaments were concentrated—a few coarse sea-shells, one or two candlesticks of polished brass, a savage saint in a black frame, and a little tinsel shrine. In the midst of these lay the fragment of a book, frayed, from constant use in horny hands, till the letter-press in places merged imperceptibly into the dusty margins,—dwindled from a fair volume into an emaciated pamphlet—a very waif and stray of literature. The title-

page had vanished long ago, but my first glance fell on a sentence—familiar, though I read it last a dozen years ago. I knew that I held in my hand the reliques of a romance once of world-wide fame, and not quite forgotten yet—the story of The Three Musketeers.

As an unit of a reading multitude, I claim a right to be amused or interested in any book whatsoever, provided it contains nothing subversive of morality or of common conventionalities; maintaining, that a critic is no more justified in quarrelling with my taste, or in insisting on the direction thereof, than he would be in dictating to the Object of my affections the fashion of her wreath at the next entertainment that she may adorn. So I am not ashamed to confess the fascination that held me when I first read that strange story.

Of course that it is wildly melodramatic, and full of 'situations' from end to end, serpentining always along the frontier line of the sublime and the ridiculous; the very title is a misnomer, and the slender thread of probability is often strained even to breaking;

but, throughout, there are redeeming touches of natural feeling, and flashes, not unfrequent, of honest humour. The audacity of fancy has something refreshing in it; when the literary Briareus wrote, or helped to write, that book, I think his fluent imagination was at the turn of high-tide.

After all, Porthos is as good a sketch of the brave, boastful, blundering Plunger, as one could easily find. The criminal blonde is rather in fashion just now; but all the possible copies of Milady stand out faint and dim beside that terrible little creature,—with her slender murderous hands, and bright cruel eyes—her face always pure and virginal, though to the rosy lips she was steeped in all sin and shame —savouring so keenly all pleasures and passions, yet ever tremulously conscious of the evil Lily-flower graven on her soft shoulder long ago.

"It was a very beautiful history," the old woman said. "She had heard it read many times; and her nephew, who was *fourrier* in the 8th Chasseurs, swore it was all true."

As the diligence lumbered on over the dull

rolling champaign, I fell into a tobacco-reverie; trying to realise the awe and admiration of that auditory, who probably never travelled ten leagues away from their birthplace in the dull grey town, as they heard how Athos drank, and D'Artagnan schemed, and Porthos fought, and Aramis loved. So, still musing on, I began to recollect and connect certain sayings and doings that I wist of—no matter how—years and years ago, till there was built up before my mind's eye the vague framework that will be filled when this story is done.

Then and there I proposed, when time should serve, to tell to such as cared to hear it, the story of four men, the eldest of whom might now scarcely have passed middle-age, who did in certain points furnish no inapt parallel to those famous Musketeers.

Now, about the virtues or vices of these men, there was nothing colossal or super-human. Speaking, and thinking, and acting in the tame modern groove, they never made the destinies of kingdoms or the fate of stricken fields change front at their sword's point;

neither did they dazzle all beholders with the *outrecuidance* of their drink, their debts, or their duels. No fixed or definite purpose bound them together, and certainly they had been constrained by no romantic impulse 'suddenly to swear an eternal friendship;' neither could their association be accounted for by any identity of interests, community of pursuits, or even special similarity of tastes: indeed, in each of the four characters there was marked distinctive difference.

But, fighting the battle of life each after his own fashion, they found themselves after awhile—unconsciously perhaps—knit into a brotherhood-in-arms, and kept the implied compact unbroken to the very end; acting independently as it seemed, they never lost sight of their unshaken motto—One for all: all for one.

You who read will judge, how far my parallel holds good.

CHAPTER II.

THE TABAKO PARLEMENT.

If I wished thoroughly to confute or confuse one of these ingenious Gauls, who cease not to make mouths at our insular rigidity and reticence, I think I would induct the caricaturist into a well organised smoking-room in any pleasant country house, about the hour of midnight. Then and there, placing my foreigner in the midst, I would say—

"Monsieur my friend, much of your trenchant satire is, unhappily, too true. We *do* beat our *blanche meess* occasionally with a thick staff. Those radiant creatures who left us a while ago, are always liable to sale in the public mart, with a cord of silk and gold about their swan-necks. Those loungers around you, in broidered raiment of many colours, *do* gorge themselves daily with the bleeding bifstek deluged with portare-beer—

ask rather M. Victor Casserole, our *chef* and your compatriot. I may not deny that most of our notables—especially our Prime Ministers —die early and miserably of the fatal spleen. Through the dull winter months, every other leafless tree in our parks bears the bitter fruit of a self-suspended aristocrat. All this—casting upon my head these white ashes—I confess and concede. But tarry here, I pray you, one short half-hour; and then say if, in his own saturnine way, Milord is not capable of a *causerie.*"

Truly the candid physiologist might be induced to tone down his grotesque ideal; even as Jules Janin, the misobritannic, was somewhat moved to recantation, when, in the Exhibition year, he stood astonied before 'the celestial beauty of the officers of the 1st Life Guards.'

But, by a well-organised smoking-room, I do not mean a dreary chamber of refuge, at the extreme end of a chilling corridor, wherein, arriving the first—

> Herald of a mighty band,
> And a glorious train ensuing,

you find some ghastly faded lithographs on the

bare walls—the weather staring in through uncurtained windows — a fresh-lighted fire struggling sullenly into existence, with a guilty consciousness that it ought to consume its own smoke—and a dozen gaunt chairs, exiles like yourself, that have grown hardened and rugged in their shame. You can smoke, and drink too—more's the pity—but a *causerie*, to such as are cast out in these dreary places, is absolutely unattainable. To a widely different haven may favouring Fates conduct me and mine, when our day's work, or play, is done. Let it be a room, to begin with—not a penitential cell—bearing tokens of constant human habitation; neither gorgeous in ornament, nor exquisite in luxury, but with comforts enough to satisfy all those honest epicureans who delight in the low-backed chair; a chamber wherein light reading and easy writing might be transacted, not incongruously; a sanctuary, in fine, wherein, if her court were *very* select, the Queen of Hearts might linger for a brief space—

Sweetening the cobblers with smiles, and firing Havannahs with glances,

without grave impeachment of her gracious dignity.

It might have puzzled an ingenious Sybarite to suggest an improvement on the *tabagie* at Marston Lisle. It was, indeed, about the most attractive apartment in a very pleasant house, and the favourite resort of Philip Gascoigne's intimates at all hours of the twenty-four. The first glance at the interior gives you an insight into the owner's tastes and character.

Evidently not a sportsman's den. Not one of the many objects around savours of the saddle or the gun-room. Those slight riding-canes are suggestive of canters in the Row, of lounges through shadowy glades under bright summer weather—of anything, in fact, rather than rough resolute cross-country work: the firelocks gleaming on the crimson wall, forgot to be deadly ten generations ago, and now only testify to the cunning of the craftsmen who damasqued or mounted them with silver and ivory and pearl: those lustrous flies — baits tempting enough to beguile the wiliest of salmonidæ, —were wrought by a Hand that has been in

practice since the Creation-day. That carved bookcase, filled with the creamy vellum of rare Elzevirs, would not be out of place in any scholarly retreat. But what has the earnest student to do with all these delicate knick-knacks—jewelled, enamelled, and golden,—that would beseem Belinda's boudoir; or with cabinet-pictures that might have troubled the sanctity of St. Anthony's musings? That recess, half shaded by velvet curtains, might hold the bust of doctor, or divine, or poet, at the least. Wise Pallas protect us! It enshrines Pradier's latest sin in marble—a languid lissome Leda.

No wonder that Philip Gascoigne seemed so thoroughly at home there.

Of a nature rather frail than frivolous, he would enter keenly into every fresh pursuit, and abandon it, not so much from weariness or disgust as from a moral incapacity to persevere beyond a certain point in any one path—that of duty excepted; variable as a weather-glass in his fancies, in his affections he could be firm and ture as steel; Bolingbroke was not more delicately luxurious in his tastes, nor Sidney purer

from the earthly taint of a voluptuary; a ruffled rose-leaf troubled him sorely, but he was capable of real self-denial and self-sacrifice, though in this way he had rarely been tried. His nerve was indifferent and his moral courage uncertain, but a Berserk was not freer from mere physical fear.

Altogether, it was a very loveable, if not a very admirable character; few *dilettanti* get through their social duties, with more credit to themselves and satisfaction to their friends, than did gentle Philip Gascoigne.

Though this sketch may not be vividly like, you would pick him out at a glance from his companions, on this the first occasion of your meeting.

A slight figure, with a feminine roundness of joint and delicacy of the extremities; a fair, pale face, with small regular features, tapering off rather weakly below; black wavy hair; and great dark eyes, whose habitual look is rather dreamy and vague: altogether a remarkable reproduction of his favourite family portrait—the lovely little Provençal Countess, whom Aylmer Gascoigne brought here a century ago, and could

not keep alive through the fourth winter, though he would have drained his own heart's blood, drop by drop, to have saved her. The husband never knew, till the young wife lay a-dying, how great love for him was ever battling against her pining for the sunny South, till the struggle, and her innocent remorse, had killed her.

A stronger contrast, in all externals, to Philip you could hardly find than in the man who is sitting nearest to him now.

The face was handsome, certainly, but with no striking peculiarity of beauty or intellect—bold, straight-cut features, with a hearty frank expression, perfectly clear of coarseness, of a type very common near the northern border, such as you may see represented by the score at any parade of the Household cavalry;—a face that right seldom belies itself, when it promises the *mens sana in corpore sano.* It kept faith here, at all events. The first time Maurice Dering looked with his bright brown eyes full into yours, and clasped your palm with his long sinewy fingers, you felt that all that was in the man, be it much or little, was thoroughly genuine and

real; you knew that he would say what he meant and act as he meant, without favour or fear; an ally that a friend in bitter need might rest against, as though his back were set to a rock.

The face was right well matched by the figure. There were the long sinewy limbs, whose gripe might convince the most obstinate refuser that honesty was the best policy, even with a big 'double' to the fore; and the straight muscular arms, apt alike to the sway of racket or sabre; and the lissome wrist, that might send thirty yards of line skimming away with never a breath to aid it, or make a foil curl viperishly round an antagonist's blade; and the square deep chest, in which the lungs might play at their pleasure, against the breast of never so steep a brae.

Nevertheless, there was nothing gigantesque or Homeric about Maurice Dering. He was simply a fair specimen of a well-bred, athletic Englishman, in hard condition all the year round; one who would hold his own gallantly, without aspiring to supremacy, in fray, or field, or feast. Friend nor enemy could say more or less of him than this;—he *looked* at

least his character, right well, of soldier, sportsman, and gentleman.

The third member of the conclave was not so pleasant to look upon as his companions. Dimly, through the drifting smoke-rack, you discern the outline of a spare figure; a pallid passionless face, scarcely lighted up by cold pale-blue eyes; a high, narrow forehead, from which the scanty hair is fast receding; a strong, shapely chin; and thin compressed lips, more apt to sneer than smile. It is altogether rather a negative than a positive face, bearing no traces of discontent much less of melancholy, and it is rather indifferent than weary; you would say that, if Paul Chetwynde has been spared bitter disappointment or serious sorrow, he has had short measure of life's enjoyments, or lacked the power of appreciating them aright.

He was born with the slow, stubborn, phlegmatic temperament, out of which most philosophers have been made; and the indolent contemplative mood had grown on him, till the springs of strong emotion, or active exertion, seemed rusted utterly. It might have

fared better with him if he had been forced to work for his bread; but the great House, of which he was an off-shoot,—magnificent in nepotism—forced Church or State to provide for its cadets even to the third and fourth generation. Paul Chetwynde had scarcely emerged from legal infancy, when he was inducted into one of those downy official chairs that modern upholsterers have ceased to manufacture, whose occupants are never troubled for their signature till their quarter's salary is due; and there he had lounged ever since,—morally and socially the most thorough-paced of sinecurists.

He would have been puzzled to count the half of his acquaintance, but he might very easily have reckoned up his friends. He was not at all proud or partial in the selection of his society. So long as the drama amused or interested him, he seemed to care little whether the curtain drew up in a saloon or a garret—whether the stage-players were Belgravian or Bohemian; he would patronise any theatre as a spectator, utterly declining in anywise to identify himself with the management. He would take

his fair share of conversation—pleasantly or cynically—as it might happen; but the most simple-minded egotist never tried, a second time, to interest him in their hopes or fears, or joys or sorrows. It was understood that Paul Chetwynde was on visiting terms with the world in general, and that the intimacy was to go no further.

So it came to pass that, of the thousands with whom he interchanged salutes in the course of a season, very few liked, fewer still loved him: on the other hand, not a few disliked him intensely. Society objects naturally to vivisection exercised upon itself, especially when the experiments are conducted solely for the instruction or entertainment of the operator. Chetwynde's name had never been coupled with that of any woman, alive or dead, for honour or for dishonour; in his own rank of life he was free from suspicion of the briefest *liaison;* if he erred anonymously, his nearest friends were ignorant of the sin; as for serious 'intentions,' he had never been troubled to deny them.

It was no wonder if the ranks of his feminine foes were recruited daily. The haughty

Sultana chafed, unconsciously, in presence of the insolent barbarian, on whom her imperial smiles and frowns alike fell harmless; the Fair Circassian (priced in the marriage-market at 100,000 tomauns) had not heart or patience to exhibit her little attractions and accomplishments before a guest hardly polite enough to applaud her; the brazen black-eyed Almè felt discouraged and constrained before the impassable Effendi, from whom, when all her songs and dances were done, she could hope to extract no more substantial recompense than a quiet half-contemptuous smile. Perhaps among the chaperones Paul's bitterest enemies were ranged. It was impossible to say how intensely some manœuvring mothers, exemplary Christians and good-natured women in the main, hated and dreaded those cold keen eyes of his; how they got fidgety, and hot, and nervous, under an uneasy sense of detection; striving, all the while, to wrap up their pet 'plants' and plans, just as a Romagnese peasant shields her baby from the *jettatura*.

Yet the conscious matron disquieted herself in vain; a faint speculative curiosity was the only

motive for Chetwynde's apparent vigilance; interference one way or the other, to aid or to thwart, was utterly out of his line; though he would not help in laying the toils, he would not trouble himself to warn any 'stag of ten' going blindly to his doom. Nevertheless, it is possible that certain intended victims, meeting by chance one of his searching glances or cynical smiles, may have been roused in time to a sense of their danger; even as sound sleepers toss uneasily and wake at last with a start, if you gaze down in their faces long and steadily.

I have given more space to this sketch of Paul Chetwynde than to those of his companions; because, in his nature, the contradictions were far more subtle and hard to understand; indeed, he would have been sorely puzzled himself, at times, to define his own motives.

The marked difference in the characters of the three men displayed itself, even in such a trivial accident, as the manner in which they severally consumed tobacco.

Under Maurice Dering's thick chestnut moustache, rested easily one of those strong, firm,

smooth cheroots, that look so thoroughly business-like, hard to ignite, harder still to extinguish, that will waste away steadily to the very end in any ordinary wind or weather; a weed to solace a half hour of expectancy, while the beaters are 'getting round' in an interminable cover, or while the hounds are drawing, painfully, 200 acres of tangled woodland, to find that staunch forest-fox that has beat them thrice already, and will beat them again to-day. The *papelito*, redolent of priceless Latakia, that Philip Gascoigne's slender fingers renew with such swift lissome dexterity, seems made for those delicate lips, womanlike in the softness of their outline. That wonderful pipe of Chetwynde's might have aided the meditations of Whately—a pipe that would strike terror into the soul of the stoutest Fox that ever was initiated into Burschenschaft, especially if filled lip-high with the strong seductive mixture, the secret of which only Paul and his purveyor knew—admirable, if only as a masterpiece of Viennese art—the bowl, a huge urn, held up in the arms of a *bayadère* reclining along a carved tree-stem, her long lithe

limbs tinged, as the living models might be, with a tender golden-brown.

The longer you looked, the more clearly some trifling peculiarity of voice, or gesture, or manner, brought out the distinctive characteristics of the three—soldier, *dilettante*, and philosopher.

No one would have suspected Philip Gascoigne of purposeless indolence or want of energy, if they had seen him that night for the first time. Evidently, for once, he was thoroughly in earnest, and bent on carrying his point in the argument, which—in rather a one-sided way—had been sustained for nearly half-an-hour. It had arisen on Dering's avowal that his name was down for exchange into one of the cavalry regiments serving in India.

Maurice made the confession with a certain amount of diffidence and hesitation; and, throughout the controversy that ensued, an odd conscious half-contrite look, such as few had ever seen there, clouded his frank, bold face—the look of a man who, having done rather a foolish thing which he is bound to abide by, finds himself, morally, so tied up, as to be unable even to explain his

reasons. He was so utterly unpractised at evasion or excuse, even with strangers, that it was no wonder if he soon became miserably entangled in his talk, when, for the first time since their intimacy began, he seemed bound to exercise some reticence towards his friends.

He had hinted at first that there might be motives, prudent and pecuniary, for the step he had resolved on; but when he saw the puzzled expression of Gascoigne's great black eyes change into reproach—the impatient shrug of Chetwynde's shoulders was equally significant in its way—he broke down in the middle of rather an involved sentence about—"York being very expensive quarters—hunting five days a-week all last winter—bad luck with horses," &c.

"No; it isn't that. I swear, it's too bad to abuse the fine old city, that was so kind to us—to say nothing of the county. I wish I had hunted six days a-week instead of five; and The Moor is worth twice what I gave for him, even if he don't win the Cup. Phil, you needn't look so sad about it. Of course, I owe a little; but if I'd been really hard up, I would have told

you before I told the Jews. But I think I ought to see India: the regiment's so low down on the roster, that it may not go out for the next ten years. One ought to have a year or two, at all events, where there's a chance of real work, if one really means soldiering. I've got my troop so lately, too, that I shall hardly lose a step. It's the right thing to do, I'm certain; though I know you wouldn't like it."

"You did guess that?" Gascoigne retorted, with a very unusual inflection of sarcasm in his gentle voice. "I wonder you troubled yourself to think about it at all. I don't a bit believe in all that military conscientiousness. But, if it's all as you say, you need not have made arrangements till you had done your duty—yes; I say, your duty,—by Geoff, and me. It was only yesterday, that Georgie was telling me, to be sure and book you for best-man directly you came here, unless his Reverence had been beforehand with us. There, you needn't flush so; it's no great compliment. I suppose she was afraid I should choose that dreary disagreeable old Paul

—*pas si bête*—who sits there, smoking like a donkey-engine, never helping me out with a word."

"Don't be fractious, Philip," Chetwynde said; "and do remember that abuse is no argument, especially when it's levelled at an unoffending innocent like me. How could I help you? I don't know which to admire most; your eloquence—a little querulous, perhaps, but *very* moving—or Maurice's newborn sense of duty. Bless you, *mon sabreur;* I wish I could paint. There should be a pendant to the Awakening Conscience. But I do hope you won't leave this Paradise, where there's so much marrying and giving in marriage, before the Feast of Roses. Miss Verschoyle is thoroughly right. I've no sort of business to stand in the foreground of her wedding-picture: it would be a sin to spoil the blaze of bridesmaids. The other will be a much quieter affair. I suppose Geoff will charter me, and Ida won't object to my dreariness: she's used to it, you see."

"How absurd you are, Paul," Gascoigne said peevishly; "taking everything *au sérieux*.

You'll be fancying next that Georgie dislikes you. Now, I know——"

"Don't flurry or worry yourself," Chetwynde broke in, "I choose not to fancy anything of the sort. It's a simple question of decoration. Miss Verschoyle has as much right to exercise her taste here, as in the setting of her jewels. I don't believe she has the shade of an unkind feeling towards me, or towards any one else in the world, for that matter.

"She is a dear good little thing,"—Gascoigne assented, flushing up with pride and pleasure, —"I can't think how any one can have the heart to disappoint her. The most provoking part of it, after all, is, that I can't guess at the real reasons for this Indian fancy. It is unlike Maurice to make mysteries unnecessarily."

"Don't you see that you are begging the question, you simple Philip? The necessity for his silence, is the very point that must puzzle you and me. If Maurice is in any scrape that won't bear talking about, I'm as sorry for it as you can be; but I'm not inclined to be plaintive, because he chooses to bear his burden alone.

His shoulders are broader than ours, remember. Besides, there must be a limit to confidences somewhere. *Que diable*, we are men and not school-girls."

In spite of Chetwynde's special pleading, there was more of the judge than the advocate in the keen cold glance that rested steadily, though not unkindly, on Dering's troubled face. Nevertheless, Maurice met it fairly; his mind had evidently been made up during that slight diversion of the talk; and, when he spoke, there was the old ring of truth in his firm decided tones.

"It serves one right for making excuses," he said, with a short half laugh. "Paul, I do believe you fancied, a moment ago, that I had done something to be ashamed of. You villanous cynic! I wonder what you will doubt next. The fact is, I'm not in any scrape at present; and—I don't mean to be—that's why I'm down for India. I hate making mysteries; but I simply *can't* tell you any more now: some day, I daresay, you'll know all about it: till then you must take me on trust. And, Philip,

I'll promise you not to start till I have seen you fairly wedded, unless the exchange absolutely obliges me. Won't you be satisfied with that?"

A harder heart and a sulkier temper than Gascoigne's might have melted and softened before the kind eagerness of the honest handsome face: he wrung Dering's hand with more strength that you would have thought lay in the slender white fingers.

"I trust you to the very end, Maurice, through all and in spite of all. I'm sorry, of course, that you must go; but I'm not childish enough to press for more than you promise. I'm certain you're right; and Paul thinks so too: he never doubted you any more than I did; it's only a way he has with his eyes."

"Quite so," Chetwynde said, shaking out the last ashes of his pipe with a slight yawn. "You put it very prettily, Philip. There's an acidulation in your abuse which makes it rather pleasant than otherwise. Now I'm going to bed; not that I'm sleepy, but I want to set you a good example: you must train gradually into keeping better hours before your bachelor-hood is done.

I do believe, now, you consider natural sleep the very last resource of an intellectual mind. *Ite: missa est.*"

And so, with few more words of no moment, the conclave was broken up. It is certain that Paul Chetwynde spoke truth when he said he was not sleepily inclined. Long after his comrades had passed into dreamland, he sat in his own room—his brow bent in grave perplexity—gazing moodily into the embers of his decaying fire; as if hoping that some figures of the faint future might reveal themselves there.

CHAPTER III.

AUNTS AND COUSINS.

A CERTAIN out-look from the manor-house of Marston Lisle, was one of the country wonders.

The building was niched on a shelf—half artificial—of an abrupt shoulder of the chalk downs, just where the vale of the Lene opened out to its broadest; at one especial point the ground fell away so suddenly, that there was scarcely level space under the walls for a terrace and a heavy stone balustrade. Just at this angle jutted forth the huge eastern oriel of the dining-room; there was nothing in the foreground to break the view: so that, from thence, the eye could range right over the glistening river-reach below, and the soft green meadow-lands beyond it, into the thick beech-woods of the opposite hill-range, two long leagues away. A very fair landscape—with the peculiar charm of

being thoroughly *homely* and English in the minutest detail.

In that same oriel, early in the afternoon following the night you have heard of, all the Marston party, with the exception of Paul Chetwynde, were gathered; lounging and chattering, as people will do, when luncheon is just over, and no important expedition is on hand. Two of the group, you know already; two, at least, of the others deserve to be sketched, before we meddle further with their fortunes. Place and time considered—Gascoigne's bride-elect has a right to come first in order.

It is rather difficult, now-a-days, to define exactly what attributes are indispensable to the attainment of a place in the world's unprinted Book of Beauty.

There are some, of course, who took rank there, from the first, by virtue of statuesque proportion of figure and face, whose absolute perfection we cannot cavil at in our bitterest moments of boredom; for the fairy-tale comes true in real life much too often for our com-

fort, and the ugly princesses monopolise the family-wit remorselessly; so that our adoration of the Fair Sister becomes more and more distantly respectful, till we are content to exchange glances through powerful lorgnons, and to admire, with the width of an opera-house between.

Others, again,—fortunately they are few—with scant outward and visible claims to such distinction, seem to win and hold their place by fear instead of favour. These are the redoutable *mauvaises langues;* the social gladiators who are never out of training; whose weapons no novice may hope to baffle or escape —from constant practice they wield them so deftly — the sword of sarcasm, the trident of ridicule, and the net of inuendo. We do not love them, certainly; we may flatter ourselves that we do not fear them: but, when brought in contact with such, we bear ourselves discreetly and warily; rather careful to avoid offence, and not too keen to remark a glove lying near our feet; even as a stout legionary, bearing scars of many wars on his breast, may have

given the wall to a Mirmillo, without sense of shame. So the usurpers sit in high places without let or hindrance: nay—when they are plying their vocation, and their opponent is writhing under a bitter thrust sent home over the tardy guard—if we do not openly applaud we look on complacently with folded hands, and thumbs, perchance, downwards turned.

To neither of these classes of pseudo beauties did Miss Verschoyle belong. In all her nature there was not a grain of gall; and if she had felt vicious for once in her life, she must have sulked in enforced silence: a prettily pettish repartee about exhausted her powers of malice; if she had invented or chanced upon a sarcasm, it would have lost all sting in passing through those rosy pouting lips. Her features, too, were anything but faultless; taken singly and severally, perhaps not one came up to a moderate standard of perfection; but no ordinary mortal was equal to the analysis, and the critic was yet in the future who could quarrel seriously with the small face, set so becomingly in bands of

gold-brown hair—with the tender pink-pearl tint of the smooth round cheeks—with the long lustrous eyes (no one knew if they were blue or grey) that would change, swiftly as a kaleidoscope, as they became pleading, or grateful, or loving, or piteous, or anything you please—but severe.

Meeting or speaking with her, for the first time, you were at once aware of a pleasant softness and harmony, physical as well as moral; indeed, there were no more angles about Georgie's character, than about her delicate figure and limbs, moulded like a sculptor's dream. Add to this, a half-shy, confidential manner—not the less subtle because it seemed so perfectly natural—that always made her companion for the moment fancy that there existed some secret sympathy between them, of which the world in general was not worthy; a smile more often conscious than simply mirthful; and a voice perilously musical in its low intonations. It is no wonder that Miss Verschoyle became a celebrity very early in her presentation-season; and had reigned ever since, with credit to

herself and satisfaction to her friends, in her own little principality.

Many knights, stalwart or skilful, and many barons of name and fame, had broken figurative lances in her honour, since her first Drawing-room; and many strong, stubborn hearts had quivered and thrilled as she fluttered round them, before she folded her wings at last, and seemed to settle down contentedly on the loving, trustful breast of Philip Gascoigne. There must be love on both sides, people said; for, though her betrothed was wealthy and well-born, Georgie might have chosen from a dozen more brilliant alliances.

The truth must be told sooner or later. She was a coquette to the core of her nature, and had never let a fair chance of flirtation slip, from her cradle upwards until now. The exquisite arts and *finesses* of attraction, that other women acquire slowly and painfully by imitation or experience, Georgie practised instinctively in early girlhood. She had made angry passion rise in many boyish breasts, and drawn tears of envy from many of her

small rivals, long before she entered on her teens.

Indeed there was still something childish in her coquetry. She had a legion of friends of her own sex, and liked or loved them, as the case might be, honestly and unaffectedly: nevertheless, she could never resist the temptation of detaching the admirer-in-chief of her most cherished intimate; and triumphed, without a shade of remorse, in his temporary infidelity. It was admiration — not devotion — that she sought to engross; when a position became embarrassingly earnest, she could extricate herself with a tact truly marvellous, without seriously offending the pursuer. Just at the critical moment, when victory seemed very near, the aspirant found himself standing alone, with empty outstretched arms, puzzled and baffled, as Ixion when he would have clasped his cloud-love.

With so many little sins on her sunny head, it was very remarkable that Georgie should have incurred so few animosities. So far she had been perilously fortunate;—'for all men (and women)

spake well of her;' if she had any covert enemies, they kept their own counsel, and bided their time.

It would have been hard to show a prettier contrast to Miss Verschoyle than was found in her trusty and well-beloved friend and cousin, Ida Carew. Those two had been almost inseparable since their childhood, and Georgie's promotion had been somewhat ante-dated, that the pair might be presented at the same Drawing-room.

The contrast was not a foil; indeed, an impartial spectator might have given the palm of beauty, pure and simple, to Ida, as she sate there in the angle of the oriel—her face half turned aside, so that the small regular features came out in relief against the light—her clear dark eyes gazing out earnestly on the fair landscape, of which they saw not one detail. You could scarcely dream of anything more perfect, on such a very tiny scale: there was nothing *mesquin* or frail about her shapely, rounded figure, where every contour was admirably developed in miniature.

Those of the Fenella type usually have something elfish about them, and are apt to run wild, at least in their caprices. Miss Carew's nature, as far as the world knew, was provokingly quiet and serene; her manner was scarcely cold or sedate, but it was certainly indifferent. She was cleverer than her cousin, and ten times better read, and could talk well on most subjects when she chose to exert herself; but none seemed to interest her deeply, and she had no especially favourite pursuit. Many men, attracted by the delicate figure and handsome thorough-bred face, had tried their uttermost to inveigle Ida into a flirtation; but very few were courageous or conceited enough to persevere. Even compassion could not keep the listless, absent look out of her wearying eyes, that seemed to grow less brilliant as the *persiflage* proceeded; aversion itself would have been easier to overcome than that courteous supine endurance. So, up to the hour of her engagement, Miss Carew was supposed to have kept herself fancy-free. Geoffrey Luttrell had wooed her—no one knew why — after his own bluff, straightforward

fashion; and had won her, no one—perhaps not even himself—knew how.

It is better not to waste time now in analysing Ida: some of her oldest friends would have told you that there was no coil in her character worth the unravelling.

That comfortable matron, admirably dressed in the quietest taste, sitting somewhat apart from the group, seldom lifting her eyes from the chronic crochet, which is part and parcel of her ante-prandial existence, is Mrs. Carew, mother of Ida, and acting chaperon to Georgie Verschoyle, whose natural protectress is a helpless invalid, flying southward yearly, a little before the swallows. Though she seems so intent on her swift stitches, it is evident that no word of the talk going on around escapes her;—not that she is the least interested therein, but the habit of covert attention has become natural and involuntary. There is a strong family likeness between mother and daughter; though the former's features and figure must have been cast originally in a larger and coarser mould. Both have the same dark, bright, rather cold

eyes; but Ida's glances, even when most keenly searching, are not cunning, like the elder dame's.

Mrs. Carew's social work has been all against the collar, till now. In early life she had to fight the hard battle of the well-born poor. When money matters looked somewhat brighter, soon after her long widowhood began, she was delivered over, bound hand and foot, to the mercies of an awful trustee—no other than Paul Chetwynde's father—Dean of Torrcaster, and sternest of ascetics—before whose name Exeter Hall bowed itself in fearful reverence, and light-minded minor canons trembled. Conciliation and submission were the poor lady's only chance in those days of terror; she is emancipated now, for with Ida's legal infancy the Dean's guardianship ceased. But it will be long before she forgets the heart-sinking that overcame her, as, on each of the annual visits that she dared not omit, her carriage rolled under the dark echoing archway of the Close; and she knew that, for three long months, only letters from worldly sympathisers without

could console her for involuntary austerities, disciplined dissimulation, and hourly enforcement to instancy in prayer.

The trouble and subjection lasted so long, that it is not strange if, now in her late resting-time, the old nervous anxiety and timid craft hang about her still. If Mrs. Carew had once held her head fairly above water, she might have turned out a worthy, cleverish, managing woman; as it is, she will remain to her life's end a purposeless schemer—a sycophant, with nothing to gain. If anything could have disturbed Ida's haughty self-possession, it would have been the evidences of these maternal failings; but she ignored, or tolerated, or palliated them, with admirable tact and patience. Perchance she remembered on *whom* had fallen all the burden and heat of the long labouring day, and so, in justice,—if not in compassion,—was fain to forbear.

The sketch of Aunt Nellie ought not to have been left to the last. If, in that room there were fairer faces, surely there is not one pleasanter to look upon than hers, as she lingers

still in her place at the deserted table, coaxing and feeding her pet lory. Even Time could not help laying his hand lightly and lovingly on the gentle brow—smooth and white as an infant's still, though hard on half a century has fled since Nellie Gascoigne was 'chrissom child.' Her face must always have been lovely in its delicacy, without a claim to real beauty. Perhaps it was never more attractive than at this moment; framed in the quiet cap, artistic in its modesty, and in the smooth bands of the soft abundant hair that changed before its time, and glistens now, silvery-grey.

In the lives of most old maids, I suppose, there is a secret; not a horrible skeleton, mouldering slowly away in the closet, that must be opened daily; but—let us hope in charity—a relic all the more precious and fondly cherished because there is a tinge of sadness—perhaps of deep-rooted sorrow—in the memories to which it is bound; a relic more powerful to drive away sullen lethargy and hot heart-fever than any that has been blessed in the Vatican; a relic, the sight and touch of which keeps

life in hope rather than in despair,—one that a tender, patient Christian woman may hold close to her breast, without fear or shame, even when heaven's dawn is breaking, and the meeting is very near.

Of all the tears shed on this earth of ours, not the bitterest, surely, are those sprinkled on Dead Sea roses till the sere leaves bloom again.

Such a secret, Miss Gascoigne's gentle heart guarded in its chamber beyond the veil. But the story was never told, even to Philip, the centre of all her hopes and fears—Philip, who had scarcely missed his dead mother, since he sobbed himself to sleep in Aunt Nellie's arms, an hour after he was left an orphan.

Exemplary matrons, immaculate in all respects as Cæsar's ideal wife, will, we are told, occasionally, over the midnight hearth, interest the trustiest of their cronies in certain romantic reminiscences, relating—not to the respected Head of the family, whose fitful snorings from the drawing-room below play quaint accompaniment to the whispered tale; but rather to a tomb toward which the good lady will travel back in thought

at rare intervals, to hang a tiny wreath of *immortelles* there; though her lot has fallen in pleasant places since the burial-day, and she would thrust back the faintest repining not less severely than any other temptation to ungrateful sin. The memorial wealth of widowhood is proverbially vast, and lavishly dispensed. But the mature maiden—as I like to fancy her—is more shy and reticent in her confidences: many such, frank and open as the day on all other subjects, have lived and died, leaving their nearest and dearest in ignorance and doubt as to the *one* recollection to which they clung with a simple steady faith, knowing no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

We have lingered long over the *mise en scène;* but I hope you have nearly realised the group in and around the great oriel window, on that bright, breezy October afternoon.

Rather an animating discussion is in progress just now. By a rare chance, Miss Verschoyle seems not to have it all her own way; her fair cheek is slightly flushed in pretty provocation, and mutinous mischief glitters in her eyes; nor

can the thick folds of the riding-habit always deaden the significant sound of a tiny boot-heel venting impatience on unoffending oak. It is very evident who are her opponents in the controversy; for there is a vexed, anxious look on Dering's face, and puzzled perplexity on Gascoigne's.

The case is simple enough. Miss Verschoyle has set her heart on riding Queen Mab, a recent addition to the Marston stable; Maurice has volunteered an opinion, that the experiment would be hazardous in the extreme. No wonder poor Philip was in a great strait; he had yet to learn the possibility of discussing any one of his wilful mistress's whims; but he had implicit confidence in his friend's knowledge of horseflesh, and, for years past, had been wont to consider his decisions final. It so happened that the mare in question had been purchased by the stud-groom, almost on his own authority, in Dering's absence; the latter, by the merest accident, had seen her out at exercise that morning; and the conclusions he then drew were confirmed by closer inspection.

Never was human being less fitted for an arbitrator than Philip Gascoigne, especially when both the contending parties were very dear to him in their several ways; so there was a palpable timidity about his attempt to temporise.

"Georgie — would you mind waiting just a few hours longer, till we are quite sure the mare is fit for you? Maurice wouldn't disappoint you any more than I would, if he could help it, I know. He shall ride her himself to-morrow morning, and, if she is really gentle, you might mount her in the afternoon. I do feel nervous about a first experiment to-day; especially as I can't look after you, for those terrible lawyers will be here directly, and they'll hold me fast till dinner-time."

The pout of Miss Verschoyle's plump, rosy lips seemed more confirmed; she threw back her pretty head in disdainful petulance, and the restless foot quickened its movement perceptibly.

"No, thank you, Philip, I don't care for half concessions. If I don't ride Queen Mab to-day,

I will never mount her at all. It is too absurd: we saw her out twice last week, and she was going so beautifully. Perhaps I had better give up riding altogether for the present. I am quite tired of that steady, stupid, old Caliph; he is never thoroughly awake, except when he hears the hounds. I suppose he was dreaming of some famous run when he stumbled with me last Friday—he did, though you wouldn't allow it—now, that really *was* dangerous. Yes, I'll stay at home this afternoon, and help Aunt Nellie to do the honours of Marston to Mr. Rule and the other terrible lawyer. *I'm* not afraid of them."

There was not a tinge of the virago in all Georgie's delicate nature; but she certainly looked afraid of nothing just then; only, more provokingly lovely than ever, in the assertion of her wayward self-will.

Philip turned to his ally with a glance and gesture of serio-comic despair.

"You see, and you hear," he said. "What can one say or do? *C'est plus fort que moi.* Perhaps, if you rode very slowly and carefully?

—Certainly, Price did tell me, yesterday, that the Queen was perfectly safe."

"Of course," Maurice retorted, with something nearer a sneer than he had often indulged in—"I dare say he told you, too, she was perfectly sound. I'll forfeit five times her value if her hocks stand summer work, when the ground is hard again. I saw this morning how she could catch hold of her bit; and if there is not temper, or worse, in that eye of hers, I'll never buy a horse on my own judgment again. When did you ever know a stud-groom allow a fault in an animal that he had bought himself from an intimate friend of his own? I warned you, from the first, not to trust that man too far; there's too much of the dealer, and not half enough of the sportsman in the place he came from to you. If Paice knew his own business, as he pretends to do, your horses would be three weeks forwarder in condition at this time of the year. I'm not quarrelling with ignorance, now; but with obstinacy. If Miss Verschoyle would only condescend to mount that poor disgraced

Caliph once more—he's the best hunter you ever owned, Phil—and allow me to ride the Queen to-day, I think she might alter her opinion."

The spoilt child was more seriously angry than she had often been in her light-minded life. This last malignment of her favourite was quite too much for her equanimity; she rather prided herself, too, on her judgment in horseflesh—on never being captivated by a showy head or tail; when Queen Mab was brought up for her inspection and 'passed' with high approval, Mr. Paice had condescended to compliment her acute discrimination. She liked Maurice sincerely, and had always admired his physical prowess; but all this—and more—was forgotten in the keen irritation of the moment. As she answered, she swept a low graceful curtsy, defiant as a swordsman's salute.

"Miss Verschoyle is infinitely obliged for the kind offer, and deeply sensible of all this anxiety for her safety; she would prefer dispensing with both. My poor Queen shall not be so hardly tried; I could fancy *anything* being fretted into a wicked temper, if it were subjected to Captain

Dering's science and powers of aggravation. If strong, wise people would only let us weak, foolish ones alone—how much nicer it would be! Philip—suppose this *is* a whim of mine—it is the very first one you have ever refused me. If you choose that Captain Dering shall be master of the household as well as of the stable, and dismiss your servants or your horses at his good pleasure, of course I have not a word to say. Yes—just this one—it is quite too soon for *me* to submit to his authority."

No such bitter or uncourteous speech had ever passed her rosy lips since Georgie's nursery quarrels ended: before it had been uttered five seconds, she felt heartily sorry and ashamed of it.

Maurice started as if he had been sharply stung. He bit his lip hard, and bent his brows involuntarily, as he drew back into the corner of the oriel; nevertheless, there was more of pain in his expression, than of anger or offended pride. A very close observer might have noticed a swift faint flush sweep across Ida Carew's pale cheek; a slight curl of the scornful lip; the briefest flash

of the cold, bright eyes that still looked musingly over the glistening lowland. Gascoigne's face, ill trained to suppress emotion, told plainly enough his vexation and bewilderment. Nor was Aunt Nellie's less eloquent in its sad surprise.

But, before any one else could speak, the honeyed accents of the veteran chaperon, expert beyond her fellows in all arts of conciliation, glided smoothly in; that widow's cruse was never void of its oily store, when troubled waters were around her.

"My dearest Georgie, how can you be so thoughtless and ungrateful? What possible motive, but kindness, can Captain Dering have, in warning you? It is useless my interfering, I suppose; you never listen to me, now—you wicked, wilful puss! What should I do, if anything were to happen to you? I could never meet your dear mother again; and, as for poor Sir Archibald——"

Solvuntur risu tabulæ. Georgie's silver laugh rings in, merrily, here—cutting short the plaintive reproof, and enticing Philip and Aunt Nellie

irresistibly to join her. The cloud breaks on Maurice Dering's brow; even Ida cannot repress a smile. The idea of Sir Archibald Verschoyle's paternal solicitude has vanquished the gravity of the entire party.

The august eyes of that great Indian magnate have not rested on his fair offspring since she was carried on board the 'Ganges' in her gorgeous *berceaunette;* he keeps a royal house, in the far upland district, where he rules in serene autocracy, that he will be loth to exchange anon for a seat in the Supreme Council; and has identified himself, if all tales are true, with more Eastern customs than one; indeed, he might adopt the Koran conscientiously, in most points save in abjuration of wine. His interests are all bound up in the land of his adoption; an important promotion in his own service affects him far more deeply than a change of ministry at home; though 'home' is a strange misnomer for one who has never cared to go on ship-board, since he sailed down Channel with the beard whose grizzled luxuriance might almost rival Charlemagne's, just sprouting on his chin.

Sir Archibald Verschoyle is laudably regular, and chivalrously lavish, in all matters of finance; besides these fiscal communications, he writes, or causes to be written, a formal letter of inquiry, four times a year; but within these limits his notions of marital and paternal duty seem to be confined; and, otherwise, it may be doubted if he recognises the existence of legitimate wife or child.

If ridicule kills romance, it certainly is fatal to worse things too; so it was proved now. The cunning meteorologist, wishing to avert the coming storm, could hardly have devised a more efficient lightning-conductor than that last unfinished sentence: if she used it by chance, those lucky instincts were not uncommon with her; if of aforethought, her look of puzzled reproach—as if she could not conceive what every one was amused at—was a creditable triumph.

Miss Verschoyle's face changed, rapidly as was its wont, from gay to grave, softening into the prettiest expression of timid penitence.

"You are quite right to scold me, Aunt Mary; only it was not Georgie that spoke just now,

but some evil spirit in her likeness. But Captain Dering and I are too old friends to quarrel long about some stupid hasty words, which meant less than nothing; and, Philip, don't be deceitful—trying to look cross, when you know you've forgiven me already. You'll let me ride the Queen, after all, if it's only to see what care Captain Dering will take of me. You will do that, won't you—Maurice?"

It was the very first time she had ever called him by his Christian name, though she often spoke of him thus to others. The dangerous, subtle caress of her accent sent a thrill through Dering's whole frame that might have betrayed itself in his voice if he had answered in words; but he only bowed his head, and laid his lips lightly on the little extended hand, with a knightly courtesy that became him well; sealing at once a truce and a promise. Gascoigne was too pleased at the turn matters had taken to press objection further, especially when he saw that his chief backer had evidently deserted him.

Ida Carew rose quickly from her seat; shaking

her riding-skirt clear, with rather an impatient gesture.

"The horses must surely be ready by this time," she said; "it is a pity to waste more of this lovely day. What do you ride, Captain Dering? It will have to carry a heavy responsibility, besides yourself, remember."

"The Moor, of course," Maurice answered, gaily. "One always mounts one's first charger, or—what comes to the same thing—one's best horse, for escort-duty. He has had a steady gallop this morning, too; so he ought to set an example to Queen Mab, if she needs one. But, after all, a gentle light hand works wonders, and I dare say she will give us no trouble. We can start as soon as that lazy Paul is ready."

The person alluded to sauntered into the room, just as the last words were spoken; but if he heard them, he did not choose to take up the challenge: his sharp searching eyes roved over the faces round him: though all now looked cheerful and serene, by some strange instinct of discrimination, he guessed part of the truth at once. So, while the rest still lingered, talking

about letters that ought to be written, or other trifles not worth recording, he drew Maurice aside, and questioned him in a whisper. When a dozen hurried sentences had told him all he wanted to know, the significant shrug of Chetwynde's shoulders, and lift of his marked eyebrows, were a better commentary on the absurdity of the whole discussion than any spoken sarcasm. *He*, at least, understood the futility of debating, at that time, the wildest whim expressed by the empress-elect of Marston Lisle.

Sweet Georgie Verschoyle had a natural talent in such cases that the astutest of female politicians might have envied: somehow or another she always contrived to turn the tables of right and wrong on her opponents, impressing them with a conscience-stricken sense of having oppressed her tyrannically. In spite of her charming contrition even now, you will observe she had her own way absolutely at the last.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE THE START.

DERING was in the gravelled court before the great hall-door, where the horses were waiting, some minutes before the others joined him.

Mr. Paice was there, on foot, of course. That dignitary condescended, for once, to assist at the ceremony of mounting, so that the riding party should start under the most favourable auspices.

The appearance of the great stud-groom was certainly not prepossessing. Sulky conceit was written in every line of his flat coarsely-hewn face, whose dogged expression could never be mistaken for blunt honesty: it was easy to guess how he would bully his subordinates, and resent any interference with his own province on the part of his superiors. To these last he would probably have brought himself to cringe, if he had not discovered that saturnine self-assertion

answered best; people were disposed to believe that a servant could not be so thoroughly disagreeable, unless he were conscious of being worth something to his masters. In truth, he was rather more ignorant and idle than Dering had given him credit for; his last employer was a clever, unscrupulous, gentleman-coper, and had given Mr. Paice a gorgeous character, as the only way of getting thoroughly and quickly rid of him. He dressed his assumed character, at least, to perfection; from the crown of his low napless hat to the lowest wrinkle of his trim gaiters, there really was not a fault to find; the fold of his white diamond-shaped scarf was in itself a miracle of study and practice.

He acknowledged Dering's presence with a sort of salute under protest—his hand did not quite reach his forehead in its careless upward move—and then resumed his inspection of the horses and their appointments; never ceasing to revolve between his compressed lips the everlasting sprig of myrtle.

Only two of the other animals are worth especial notice.

Few men in the army had owned better cattle, or ridden them straighter than Dering; but he only spoke the truth when he said that The Moor was the luckiest purchase he had ever made. A dark-brown horse—with a tan muzzle, and flecked in places with the same colour — so powerfully and compactly built, that few guessed his height within two inches till they stood close to his withers; broad flat legs, clean in sinew as a Nedidje stallion's, with thrice the bone; quarters massive, without being heavy; betraying vast propelling power in every line, though an equine artist might perhaps quarrel with their symmetry; a small plainish head, admirably set on a clean-carved throat and strong neck, with the lean workmanlike look about it often seen in the descendants of stout old Slane; his girth is enormous, and there is not a suspicion of lightness about the after-ribs, though he carries little loose flesh just now; for The Moor has been doing steady work this month past, and is forward in preparation for the first big Military Race, and other autumn engage-

ments. A horse that a brave heart might trust for life, if hard bestead as the Cavalier, who rode straight down on the Northern Water with the avengers of blood on his track.

Queen Mab was a very different stamp of animal. Certainly she looks picturesquely handsome just now; with her long swan-neck arched aside, till the tapering nostrils touched her near shoulder—her bright bay coat, relieved by coal-black points, glistening under the soft autumn sun—as she steps daintily along, coquettishly conscious of her showy attractions. But she will not bear examination in detail: that looseness of joints, narrowness of chest, and lightness of barrel, must be fatal to stoutness or endurance; there is far too much length below the knee, and decided weakness about the slender pasterns; she is sure to have a flashy turn of speed, and may be hard to beat for a mile; but it is simply impossible that she can stay. Dering was thoroughly right in distrusting the mare's temper; the backward glance of her false glittering eye, always on the watch for mischief, was a sufficient warning.

A believer in the transmigration of souls might have easily indulged his fancy—looking at the pair. In The Moor might be supposed to dwell the spirit of one of those puissant ancient worthies—large of heart as of limb, somewhat rough and stubborn of mood, but always honest, and kindly, and true—men who clave their way steadily on, through good and evil report, to the accomplishment of the task set before them; neither shrinking from danger nor repining at toil; satisfied either with death in harness on a stricken field, or with brief, honourable rest in extreme old age—so that they fought a good fight, right on to the last. That showy carcase of Queen Mab's must surely have held the fretful soul of one of the wild, wicked beauties, who in all ages have arisen to serve the Tempter's ends; luring sages, soldiers, or statesmen, to sin, and ruin, and shame.

No such romantic thoughts as these crossed Dering's mind as he stood there; never noticing his own horse, but scanning the mare rather anxiously. His practised eye lighted instantly

on something peculiar in the bridle, and he walked forward to examine it.

The bit turned out to be one of those evil inventions of second-rate saddlers that are supposed to ensure safety to timid or unpractised riders; but are more likely to bring a really good horseman to grief. This especial complication of leverage, and leather, and steel, was called the Lupo-Frænum (those ingenious patentees are ambitiously classical, but usually unhappy in their grammar): it was quite enough to irritate a well-conditioned animal into sulkiness or rebellion.

Maurice looked up quickly, after a moment's inspection, with a frown on his brow, and a darker discontent on his face.

"Who, on earth, ordered you to put on such a thing as that?" he asked the groom who led Queen Mab—touching the bit contemptuously with his finger.

The man hesitated; but Mr. Paice answered for him from behind Dering's shoulder.

"It was my horders, sir; and, Captin, I must beg you won't hinterfere with my men or my

hosses. No man can't do his business if he's allus bein' hoverlooked and meddled with. I knows where I has to give satisfaction ; so long as my hown master's pleased, it ain't no odds to any one. If hanything goes wrong, I'll hanswer it."

Dering's conduct towards his inferiors was never imperious or overbearing: he exacted no undue deference; and was not apt to take offence at mere boorishness of manner: but, both as a soldier and civilian, he was used to being obeyed; and would no more have passed over impertinence from a subordinate than insult from an equal: at any other time the coarse insolence of Paice's tone would have chafed him sorely. But now, he had no time to think of himself; graver anxieties engrossed him too entirely to leave room for personal irritation. Perhaps he would have urged his point with ever so slight a chance of carrying it; but, just then, he caught a glimpse of a scarlet feather gleaming through the twilight of the vast dim hall within. He was not brave enough to risk a rupture of the peace, so lately signed and

sealed; and drew quickly back, hating himself for feeling ashamed at having been nearly caught close to Queen Mab's side.

But as he turned he set his teeth savagely, and muttered—so low, that not even the threatened man caught a syllable:—

"Answer it? By G—d, you *shall* answer it—to the uttermost. And how will that help us?"

Gascoigne came out upon the steps with the rest, ever and anon whispering a fresh caution into the little pink ear, coyly revealed under the close golden braids, that never heeded if it heard. His last words to Dering were—

"Mind, I trust her entirely to you."

The other answered only with a cheery, confident nod. Whatever his forebodings might have been, Georgie Verschoyle's bright face did not look happier than Maurice's, as he swung her dexterously to saddle, and settled the intricacies of her skirt like a practised hand.

Philip stood for some seconds alone under the huge grey porch, watching the party

There was always a subdued tinge of melancholy in his smile; but it was sadder than usual just now: he could not shake off a vague sense of impending evil. In very truth, his happiness was in more peril than he wist of; and the danger came in more shapes than one.

Mr. Paice, too, looked after the receding figures till a turn in the avenue cut off the view. An ugly, saturnine satisfaction was dawning on his face, that—but for a natural lack of intelligence—might have expanded into a sneer.

"D —— *his* impudence!" he muttered; "I'm right glad I spoke out. I reckon he won't be so ready at shoving his oar in, next journey."

Revolving these things in his mighty mind, Mr. Paice retreated to his own dominions; grinding the gravel to powder under his heel as he walked, for his wrath was yet but half appeased; it was not till he had cursed several innocent helpers very freely, and 'quilted' the stable scape-goat—a silent, bullet-headed boy, off whose hardened hide the blows glanced like rain from a pent-house—that he was enabled thoroughly to relish his first afternoon cigar.

CHAPTER V.

A RACE FOR TWO LIVES.

"WHAT'S that new fancy of yours, Maurice?" Chetwynde asked, when they had ridden a little way. "I never saw you ride The Moor with spurs before, when you had no cross-country work before you."

Dering coloured slightly, as he turned his head to reply. He was riding slightly in advance of the other two, side by side with Miss Verschoyle:

"Well, I don't know; he's been showing temper, once or twice of late, since we began to train him, and I may want to remind him that we are all on our best behaviour. Miss Verschoyle, will you drop your hand a little, and feel the Queen's mouth only with the snaffle? They've tried a new bit on her to-day, and it may fret her till she's used to it."

His words did vile injustice to the staunch

old horse, who was good as he was game; but Maurice preferred calumniating his favourite, to the chance of shaking Georgie's nerve, by betraying his fear that steel might be bitterly needed before they got safe home again. Nevertheless, for the present, he really did thrust all such bodings aside.

It was no wonder. His fair charge had never seemed to him so marvellously attractive; he thought that quite half of her charms had been kept in reserve till now. She was evidently bent on making ample amends for the morning's ungraciousness and ingratitude. Her low, sweet voice changed its accent when she answered him—softening almost to tenderness; and in the deep gray eyes there was a liquid lustre, that only a favoured few had ever seen there, as they met his own with a shy invitation to exchange of confidences. So, as he rode on slowly through the warm, breezy weather, close by Georgie Verschoyle's bridle-rein, it must be confessed that stout Maurice Dering yielded, half wittingly, to a spell of fascination too deliciously potent for sense of guilt to creep in.

Conscience was silent for awhile, biding—as is her wont—in stern serenity, her inevitable appointed time.

If, in so yielding, our poor hero was unpardonably weak—nay, if he committed things worthy of death—which of us, my comrades, shall avenge virtue with the first stone?

Wiser, surely, and purer, if not happier, than his fellows is he who has not once in life, for never so brief a space, lingered in some false paradise—hope, fear, and memory, all merged by the languid luxury of the hour—while

> Over him stood the weird ladye,
> In her charmed castle beyond the sea,
> Singing—'Lie thou still and dream.'

It is Rinaldo's story over and over again.

"True," saith the knight; "not so long ago we swore fealty to the Red Cross, and enmity to the pale Paynim symbol that gleams yonder through the shadows of the Delightful Garden. Perchance, even now, the trumpets of Godfrey and Bohemond are sounding; the Templars are chanting their war-psalm; and our brethren-in-arms gather for another escalade. Let be: the

alarum may ring louder yet, and wake no echo here. There is more music in your song, O white-robed Syrens, than in the monotone of *Quare fremuerunt gentes;* there are sickles sufficient for the harvest of blood, though one reaper be resting from toil. The winter campaign was long and dreary: some short breathing-space has surely been earned. If for awhile we forget our vow, the good Hermit will assoilzie us, with light penance done; and the lost time shall be honourably redeemed. Armida is passing fair, and there is wondrous savour in her wine. So, fill up another beaker, sweet sorceress. Bow down — lower, lower yet — till your fragrant breath stir the roses in our hair. It will be time enough, to-morrow, to buckle on that heavy harness, and do our *devoir* in the front of battle."

To-morrow? Ah me! the minutes glide swiftly into hours, and hours into days. If calm, cold Ubaldo comes not soon, he comes too late. He will preach to deafer ears than the serpent's, and taunts or prayers will be wasted in vain.

Everything for the first half-hour went smoothly enough with the riding-party. Queen Mab seemed determined to justify her mistress's championship—contenting herself with an occasional snap at the infernal machine between her jaws, and a backward slope of her pointed quills of ears, for which, perhaps, the teasing flies might be responsible; the gait of those long, slender pasterns was smooth and easy enough, certainly, if not very safe. So there was nothing to distract the attention of Georgie or her cavalier from each other—nothing to break the flow of their low, pleasant talk, as they led the way slowly through the winding grass-lanes.

Neither were the rearmost pair silent. Their converse went on, with brief intervals of silence, after a quiet, sober fashion; enlivened, however, by not unfrequent flashes of irony, or a quick, sharp repartee, deftly parried. They were fast friends, those two, though there had never been a flutter of warmer feeling in either breast.

When Ida and her mother first visited the Deanery, years ago, Chetwynde could not choose but admire the cool, dauntless way in which

the girl held her own against the tyrannous asceticism to which the woman bowed so meekly, —too wise to bring things to a crisis by overt rebellion, but too proud to surrender, utterly, reasonable free agency or decent self-respect. That day was always marked with a white stone in Ida's dreary Torrcaster calendar, when she heard orders given for "Mr. Chetwynde's room to be got ready;" she felt, instinctively, that succour was coming, though the alliance was tacit, and simply defensive. Those rare glimpses of Paul—rarer and rarer each year —often enabled her resources of patience or endurance to hold out, when both were drained to the lowest ebb; just as the accession of an influential sleeping partner will help a tottering firm to tide over a perilous crisis, when the commercial cables are sorely strained.

Others besides her had remarked that Paul's presence was not eagerly insisted on at the Deanery, even if it was not positively unwelcome to its master. If that austere dignitary could ever be ill at ease, such certainly was the case when, after delivering a bitter diatribe, a pon-

derous dogma, or a pompous peroration, he met his son's cold, sarcastic eyes. There had never been an actual quarrel or expressed hostility between the two; but some of the Dean's fanatic adherents were wont to shake their heads, at times, in solemn sympathy, lamenting that even such an eminent saint should not be exempt from the thorn in the flesh of hard family trials; for Paul's only sister (who will not appear on the face of this story) was a helpless cripple from a spine-complaint born with her.

So they wandered on, pleasantly enough, till a sharp turn in the lane brought them out on a main road, in view of the huge Norman gate-tower of Harlestone Park.

The great Earl who owned that fair demesne had visited it about a score of times in as many years. He was induced to preside at certain festivities given to celebrate his coming of age; and the recollections of his sufferings on that occasion had never been effaced, though he had travelled in many lands since then, and his age 'spoiled the fifty.' The Bankshire yeoman is a rough-and-ready customer at his politest time.

The enthusiasm of the tenantry, replete with the mighty Harlestone ale, was quite too much for their languid lord; he had to undergo about the same amount of hand-shaking as a popular candidate on canvass, or a 'lion' at an American *levee;* and was oppressed by a great terror and exhaustion long before the time came for making the set oration, in which he utterly broke down. The Radicals of the neighbouring borough, of which the Earl of Tancarville possessed the fee-simple, were wont, at each succeeding election, to get up the hopeless mockery of an opposition, chiefly for the sake of airing their eloquence, in furious invectives against the omnipotent absentee, and frantic appeals to the Goddess of Liberty: 'bloated aristocrat' and 'hereditary tyrant' were among the favourite points that never failed to bring the pot-house down.

In very deed, he was a pale, slender man, rather weak in health, with a gentle, nervous manner; a remarkable talent at piquet; and a refined taste in pugdogs and snuff-boxes. He would no more have thought of deliberately oppressing an inferior than of beating his valet.

The Harlestone tenantry sate at the same easy rent as their grandsires had done; the cottages on the estate were kept in just as perfect order as the hothouses; and the Earl's name headed the subscription-lists to all local charities, with an oblation that might have shamed his followers into liberality. In acting thus, Lord Tancarville neither sought for gratitude nor intended to avert obloquy; it seemed that he was equally indifferent to either. He had peculiar notions as to the obligations of nobility: an ultra-Conservative—simply because too lazy or too prejudiced to march with the times—he set his face with a placid obstinacy against any concession or conciliation that might lead to a fusion of orders.

Trianon itself was not more jealously guarded against the commonalty than the demesne and gardens of Harlestone; no relics of pic-nics mouldered round the roots of the vast shadowy beeches; the Lady's Walk, that wound for a long mile round the inlets of the lake, was innocent of the steps of lovers, unless they came to woo some keeper's or woodsman's daughter; the picture-gallery, whose renown extended be-

yond the four seas, was a sealed paradise to all who could not produce a card bearing in its corner the Earl's small feminine initials. His agent was provided with a store of these, with injunctions, strict and stern, as to their dispensation. A favoured few of the county magnates had the privilege of riding in the park at their pleasure; and none were better known or trusted at the gates than the inmates of Marston Lisle.

When the party were once fairly launched on the smooth, sound turf, a canter, of course, was inevitable. Queen Mab went quietly enough, though she bore unpleasantly on her bit at times, in spite of all the humouring of Georgie's practised hand. The mare kept glancing sideways at the strong brown horse stealing along so steadily at her shoulder; it seemed as though she knew by instinct that it would not answer to play tricks till she could shake off that close, careful companionship. The last fifty yards of road, leading to the gate in the iron deer-fence, dividing the Home park from the outer Chase, had been freshly stoned;

as ill-luck would have it, The Moor picked up an awkward flint, that, for a few minutes, puzzled the groom's picker. The other three walked slowly on, riding abreast now.

Miss Verschoyle chanced to turn her head, just as Dering was mounting again. The spirit of merry mischief woke suddenly within her, and, for the nonce both contrition and prudence were forgotten. She thought she would take advantage of her momentary independence, to give her guardian just one tiny fright.

"One more canter," she said, with a light laugh; as she shook her reins, and drew her slender whip smartly across Queen Mab's neck.

The others were off, not a second later; but Georgie had the advantage of the start, and drew ahead of her companions at once. The mare meant vice the instant she found herself alone; a rabbit bolting from one patch of fern to another, almost under her feet, gave her the shadow of an excuse that she wanted.

A savage snatch at the bit—a boring forward plunge, that almost dragged her rider from the saddle—and Queen Mab was away at a mad

gallop, with the patent Lupo-frænum fairly between her teeth.

Of all manhood's sharp trials, surely that is the bitterest to bear, the most agonizing to remember—when we are forced to witness the mortal peril of a dear friend—powerless to help as if our feet and hands were bound; and amongst the terrors of ordinary life none is more appalling than the sight of a run-away horse, going over unknown or unsafe ground, with a woman in the saddle.

I pray, for the sake of common charity, that no word written down here may be misconstrued. If it be wrong, on a page like this, to allude, ever so vaguely, to a tragedy bitterly real, judgment—not feeling—is at fault. At this very moment, I swear, there is upon me such an awe and sadness as needs must affect us in presence of the innocent dead.

It was my evil fortune, many years ago, to witness a horror, that none who were brought near it will ever forget. I remember the fair girl's happy face, as she started for the gallop of which only God's eye saw quite the end. I

remember it, too, as she lay in the death-stupor, a few minutes after they lifted her from the cruel stones that had no mercy on her beauty. That last face——The same shrinking shudder that unmanned me then, overcomes me now, whenever I feel that it will reveal itself soon, as I walk through some dark valley of Dreamland.

Chetwynde did not greatly admire Miss Verschoyle. With him, coaxing could not atone for her coquetry; he was apt to be more provoked than amused with her caprices; and not unseldom murmured within himself, that Philip had better have chosen a less light-minded mate. But these unfavourable impressions did not amount to dislike; and, had the feeling been positive instead of negative, it would have utterly vanished in his concern for Georgie's safety. In truth, Paul's cynicism was rather surface-deep; and he took thought for others much more, and much oftener, than the world was aware of. His fears, however, had hardly time to assume a distinct form; nor, when he instinctively increased his pace to a rapid gallop, had he any clear idea of how he could help or

interfere. In another instant, a swifter, firmer hoof-beat drowned the trample of Paul's and Ida's horses ; and Maurice Dering flew past—a haggard terror in his eyes—his white face set, like a corpse's three hours old. His clenched teeth parted for a second, just as he went by ; but Chetwynde rather guessed at the meaning of the hoarse whisper, than caught the words—

"The chalk cliff!"

Those three syllables made Paul bound in his saddle, as if a bullet had struck him. He knew the place right well; so did every native or visitor within ten miles of Harlestone. It was the only sight on his broad domain from which the Earl could not debar the profane vulgar; for it was visible from many different points on the country-side that he could not control. Indeed, a clump of tall firs on the crest of the ridge had been a landmark for centuries.

It seemed as though nature had suddenly grown aweary of the monotony of long rolling downs gliding into valleys with slopes, often steep, but always smooth and unbroken. Here, for half a mile or more, the chalk went sheer

down, in an irregular cliff from fifty to seventy feet high, to a shelf along which led a rough farm-road; from thence the ground fell abruptly, but not perpendicularly, to the narrow meadows that lay on the hither side of the Lene. There had been quarries there long ago, but some whim of a Lord of Tancarville had caused these to be discontinued, and they had never since been reopened. The brushwood, growing dense wherever it could cling, made it hard, now, to distinguish God's handiwork from man's.

The chief wonder of the spot were some yews of fabulous age, whose roots had suited themselves, after the quaintest fashion, to the irregularities of soil and stone. A local poetess, of some repute, had once compared them to the rough, honest lover, who, in despite of coldness and caprice, clings ever to the side of his chosen 'white maid.' In one place a huge gnarled trunk shot out almost at right angles with the face of the cliff, where one would have thought a bush could scarcely have found foot-hold; but boys, who had ventured their necks that they might boast of having bestridden the King Yew, looked up at

that famous tree when their eyes were growing dim with age, and knew that he was not an inch nearer his downfall, but might carry their childrens' children on his sturdy back.

A right pleasant place to look up at,—floating lazily below it, when May-flies are abroad and lilies are rife on the Lene. Pleasant, too, even in late autumn, when the woodland puts on its many-coloured raiment of green and purple, and golden-bronze. But a gruesome place to think of—sitting on a mad horse's back, with his head set straight for the upper verge.

No wonder if Chetwynde was moved, almost past self-control, at the thought that only a few seconds lay between sweet Georgie Verschoyle and such a death. It was very characteristic of the man, that amidst all the pity and fear which possessed him, he should have found time to read aright the story of Dering's face: he never forgot it; no—not the secret it told.

A riddle harder to decipher—one that would have puzzled even that acute physiognomist—might have been found in the countenance of the

girl, galloping on swiftly and silently close by his bridle-rein.

The expression, indeed, was one of those nearly impossible to define accurately. When Ida Carew first became aware of her cousin's mortal peril, she felt a terror quite unfeigned, and the low cry that escaped her lips was the utterance of an emotion strong and sincere. But, five seconds later, Maurice Dering's white agonised face flashed past; perhaps it told her only what she knew before; but an evil change came instantly over her own, hardening and sharpening every line, as if wax had been turned into marble. There came into her eyes, a strange look of eager expectation and cruel contentment: with that same expression some fair patrician, habituated to Circensian excitement, may have watched from her gilded gallery the last scene of the bloody drama that the sword-players below had been acting since noon.

But of all this Paul saw nothing. He was too intent on following those flying figures in front, riding the terrible race for life.

"God help her!" the groom said, with a sob

in his voice. "It's all over in three minutes, if the Captain can't turn her. And so young, too!"

He had ranged up alongside of Chetwynde—mechanically, as men cling to each other in times of sharp peril; but was too wise to attempt a hopeless chase, or to make the mad mare wilder yet with the trample of more hoofs behind her.

"But he *will* turn her—he must," Chetwynde said. "Don't you know The Moor is far the fastest? He's gaining on her every stride. Can't you see that?"

He spoke hastily—almost angrily; but in his glance, as for an instant it met the other's, there was the earnestness of one pleading for a shadow of hope.

The groom shook his head despondingly.

"We know the old horse's pace, sir, and he'll last for ever; but we don't know much about the mare's. The distance is so terrible short, too. But I do think the Captain's drawing up, though I can't see very plain."

No wonder those honest eyes were dim; for

his glove was wet already with the drops dashed from their shaggy lashes.

The Chase was rather a misnomer now; there was less of forest there, than in most other parts of the demesne. It was a vast tract of roughish pasture, dotted here and there with small game-coverts and clumps of tall elms or beeches; the ground undulated everywhere, but in one direction sloped steadily upwards, to where some scattered firs and a low line of rails marked the brink of the chalk cliff. Altogether, it would have been as safe a place as could have been found for a run-away, if a miserable fatality had not set the mare's head straight for destruction, when she first broke away.

For a second or two, one of these clumps hid both Georgie Verschoyle and her pursuer from the others. When they shot into sight again, the latter's advantage was more perceptible. The Moor evidently had the turn of speed as well as of stoutness. But it is difficult to calculate the dangerous power of man or horse, when either is possessed with a mad devil, that, for the moment, enables ferocity to hold its own

against courage, and makes flaccid muscles tense as iron. The chances of life and death were still fearfully even.

Dering's object was, to thrust himself between Queen Mab and the cliff's edge, so as to turn her head from it; for no human hand could have checked her career by direct strength, even if it had grasped her bridle. To do this, he was obliged to ride wide of her track on the right—closing in again if he could head her; thus he lost all the ground of the arc: every stride that brought him nearer to Georgie, brought them both nearer to the precipice. Maurice felt it would be a question of a few yards at last. He felt something more than this: without any deliberate purpose of suicide, even in the event of the worst, he had a dim foreknowledge of what the end would be; he knew that another life was swaying in the same scale with his own; that, one way or other, he was sure to escape the horror and shame of seeing—himself unhurt—those delicate limbs shattered and that bright beauty marred. But he could trust his nerve, even with that awful stake in abeyance.

After the first agony of horror had passed, he never lost hope—no, nor faith; for, though his lips were rigid, his heart found time to utter one prayer—more acceptable, perhaps, in its simple earnestness than many a longer liturgy—

"May God help me to save her, or have mercy on both our souls!"

When, some weeks later, at the Walmington Grand Military, Dering landed The Moor a clever winner, and disinterested turf authorities grew warm in praise of his science and judgment, he did not show one whit more of patient coolness, than he did that day in Harlestone Chase; and the last-named race was far the closer of the two.

We have left the poor little heroine of the brief melodrama entirely to herself, all this long while—long, on paper only; for, Heaven knows, the sand flows swiftly enough, when it seems as if the hour-glass will never be turned again.

Georgie Verschoyle was really an accomplished *cavalière*. Her graceful figure was set firmly and easily in the saddle, and her hand was nearly perfect. She never attempted to emulate the

feats of the professional huntress or 'horse-breaker;' but took any necessary fence with satisfaction to herself, and was not to be discomfited by ordinary kicks or plunges. She had far more nerve, too, in spite of her delicate organisation and *mignonne* ways, than any one, at first sight, would have given her credit for. She was startled of course, and shaken too, by the first mad bolt, that almost dragged her from the saddle; but she soon settled herself again, and took a steady pull at Queen Mab's mouth. Poor child! She soon found that she might as well have dragged at an imbedded sheet-anchor as at the bit clenched in the vice of those savage teeth.

Then a cold faint feeling of fear, mingling with a vague repentance, began to oppress her. She wished—ah, how earnestly!—that she had listened to Maurice's kindly warning. More than all—why did she ever leave his side, where she would have been safe, in spite of her folly? If he were only near her now;—but he was so far away, when she cast that last saucy look behind; and Queen Mab was going so fast

—surely, every second, faster and faster. Soon, too, she had to fight against physical, as well as moral, exhaustion. No one, except those who have ridden a thorough-bred at top-speed for the first time, knows how soon a novice's breath will fail. Yet she was very near the point of peril before she realised it. She flew past several familiar tree-clumps without recognising them. All at once her eyes lighted on five firs, right in her front, standing up gauntly against the sky—all blank beyond.

She knew then that she was heading straight for the chalk cliff, at its highest point; with nothing between her and hideous death but—two furlongs or so of turf, and a slight rail, just high enough to mask the abyss, and tempt a run-away horse to fly it.

A brave man, used to grapple with all dangers of flood and field, might have shivered then, and owned it without shame: how could it fare with a delicate darling, petted from earliest infancy, in whose cheek a strong sensation-story would make the bright blood ebb and flow? The poor child closed her eyes involuntarily: for

a second or two she felt so deathly faint, that she must have fallen if she had not grasped her pommel convulsively: then came the worst 'bitterness of death'—a dim sense of guilt —a consciousness, that the life had been wasted that seemed so near its ending. She was too bewildered, in her mortal fear, to think of any formal prayer; at last, there broke from the white lips a low smothered wail—

"For Philip's sake—poor Philip's—"

She was hardly conscious of the words; but it seemed as if they sprang from a vague hope, that Heaven might spare to crush that other true, tender, blameless heart, even if she herself were unworthy of its mercy.

When Georgie opened her eyes again, the firs were fearfully nearer; the wind whistled shriller past her ears, as if mocking her agony; and the mad brute under her tore on, faster and faster. All the face of the terrible cliff, just as she had seen it last from a shallop on the Lene, rose up before her—clear as though reflected in a camera. Any death—surely, any—better than

that! The greensward cannot be so cruel as those gnarled roots and rugged stones.

So she began to disentangle her habit, half mechanically, with weak trembling hands, and in another moment would have cast herself from the saddle. The instancy of the crisis brought back something of self-command; and her heart went up to the Great Throne in one last pleading for pity, before she sprang.

A human voice answered the unspoken prayer —a voice, hoarse, and changed, and tremulous— but still recognisable as Maurice Dering's: the cry came—*level*—from the right—

"Georgie—love—in God's name sit fast!— only a second longer!"

The blood that had frozen round the fluttering heart, till its pulses were almost stilled, rushed back through the tingling veins with a revulsion painfully sweet: more than this—the girl remembered afterwards the strange thrill that pervaded all her being, as the intense suppressed passion of those tones smote upon her ear—a thrill such as she had never known from any word or caress of Philip Gascoigne's. The

secret was out at last: in the same instant that Georgie knew she was saved, she knew also that Maurice loved her dearly.

I wonder, is there any moment, in life or death, when a real woman is quite indifferent to a fresh evidence of her power?

It is true that Miss Verschoyle could not, just then, enjoy, or even thoroughly realize, her new triumph; but, that she was conscious of it, is equally certain.

Dering had never let The Moor's head go, and made his effort with consummate judgment; when he 'came,' it was with a vengeance; the game old horse had never known what real punishment was till now: but he answered each plunge of the cruel rowels without a flinch or swerve; running to the end as straight and staunch as steel. The currish, cowardly drop in Queen Mab's blood served them well. Directly she saw, first the wide tawny nostril, then the long lean head, then the mighty brown shoulders of her antagonist closing in from the right, the devil seemed to die in her; her tense muscles relaxed; her head went up suddenly; and she

began to go short, swerving to the near side. So Maurice had little more to do; for he could have borne Queen Mab round by sheer weight, when once alongside. He had thrown his whip away long ago, to have both hands free; and, as he ranged up, he laid his left firmly on the mare's bridle, just above the bit; the wrench which tore the Lupo-frænum from between her teeth, well nigh dislocating her jaw, was rather an unnecessary violence, though a most natural impulse under the circumstances.

They marked the spot, next day, where the hoof-tracks turned, and measured the distance to the rails—eighty-five yards to an inch: a narrow space for a finish, with the winning-post set between Life and Death. A white marble cross stands there now, bearing the date and the initials of the riders; a suitable inscription will be added, so soon as a scholar shall be found, able to satisfy Lord Tancarville's fastidious taste, in elegance of Latinity and polish of epigram.

"They're nearly level, now. Why don't he close in? Does he see where the rails are? They'll both go over: it's *too* horrible. Ah!—

did you see that rush? Look up, Ida: she's safe—quite safe. Hurra! I knew it—I said it. Maurice has won, by G—d."

Those words were spoken just at the crisis of the race—the first muttered under breath through grinded teeth—the last in a cheery shout; and calm Paul Chetwynde, tossing his hand aloft, waved it in a paroxysm of triumph: he had not been so excited since he helped to win the cricket-match that was the crowning glory of his school-boy days. Then he glanced aside at his silent companion, as they still galloped swiftly on.

Ida's gaze had followed every movement of the struggle for life, and she needed no telling that it was over: well over for others, but—how for her? For one second a look deformed her features, such as would not easily be matched on this side of Hell—a look of baffled malice, insatiate hate, and savage despair. Then the pale face put on its beautiful mask again, and could defy scrutiny once more. The mute gratitude, expressed by the lifted eyes and clasped hands, was correct in execution to a shade; but,

if any inward ejaculation accompanied the devotional gesture, I wot less impious mockeries of thanksgiving have gone up from The Brocken, when witches, and their Master, held Sabbath there.

Paul did not notice anything suspicious in his companion's demeanour, nor wonder at her strange silence from the first; neither did he speak again till they reached the spot where the others stood—motionless now.

A good deal of talking is done on the stage, at such moments as we have been trying to describe; but wonderfully little, when the melodrame is being acted in bitter earnest. For a minute or so after Dering's grasp was laid on her rein, Miss Verschoyle was physically incapable of uttering a syllable—simply from weakness and want of breath: the horses had stopped before she found her voice. Maurice, too, kept silence while they were slackening speed; he could not trust himself thoroughly yet. Though he scarcely remembered what the words were, that broke from him a while ago in his agony, he had a vague guilty idea of having

betrayed himself, and would not risk adding folly to folly, or sin to sin. It was well that he took time to rally all his powers of self-control, for in the next few minutes they were tried to the uttermost.

As they came slowly to a halt, Dering saw his charge sway helplessly in her saddle: he flung himself to the ground, just soon enough to catch the little drooping head on his shoulder, and to support the slender panting waist with the circle of his arm.

Had a cunning modeller of metals been present then, he might have achieved a wondrous triumph, by reproduction of that group of four.

The delicate, girlish figure, bowed down on the neck of the stalwart soldier—till golden tresses mingle with chestnut beard—in the mere helplessness of its abandonment inexpressibly lovely; and graceful withal as any tendril, that softens the outline of granite columns. The mare—a very picture of violence self-exhausted—as she rocks to and fro on shaking pasterns; panting painfully through nostrils overstrained; her wide fixed eyeballs staring

wildly still—half in terror half in rage. And the stately Moor, standing gravely by; recovering his wind after a sober and decorous fashion, as if disdaining to allow, that his own bolt was nearly shot in the moment of victory; true—the mighty flanks are heaving, and the swollen flesh quivers painfully now and then where the sharp rowels lanced it most cruelly; but there is no malice—not even reproach—in the sidelong glance that the brave old horse casts ever and anon on his master: it seems as though he knew that of all the laurels they may struggle for together, the crowning wreath has been won to-day.

So, outwardly, all looked fair enough; but how, think you, during those brief minutes, did it go with Maurice Dering's heart?

He held the one creature he loved beyond all the world beside, almost in his embrace; her soft cheek rested against his own; her breath lifted his hair, as she murmured in his ear low broken syllables of sweet gratitude and sweeter repentance: he knew, by one of those instincts that speak to men, seldom falsely, in the orgasms

of life, that he had only to complete an avowal already half made to secure the beautiful prize. It was so, too. One of those strange revulsions of feeling, that make women the chief of paradoxes, possessed Georgie Verschoyle just then. She had been so very near death, that, for the moment, she seemed to be beginning a new existence, on which the ties and memories of the former one had no hold. An hour ago she had loved Philip Gascoigne sincerely, after her own fashion; and now—she would have cast aside the one and clung to the other, without a remorse or regret.

Maurice knew all this, and yet—was strong to forbear; strong enough to crush the passion crying out fiercely within him, as one might strangle a snake in an iron gauntlet. He never pressed his advantage by word, or look, or gesture; his arm never belied the loyalty of support by a momentary tightening of its clasp. If honour and honesty had not kept him from stealing away his friend's treasure, he would still have been too proud to avail himself of a girl's romantic impulse—an outbreak of gratitude too

reckless to count the cost, though it might have been a life-long repentance.

"He only did his duty."

Of course. But, O saintly neighbour of mine—whose tithes of anise and cummin are paid to the hour; whose mites of conscience-money form a regular item in the Chancellor's balance sheet; whose frown is a caution to sinners, when you walk abroad with your august lady, if her sweeping skirt chance to be brushed by the passing Pelagia; whose moral lightning-conductors and fire insurances, so to speak, have been doubled, since the stranger came to dwell near your well-whitened gates—it might profit, perchance, even your immaculate self, some day, if you could recall a struggle and a victory like this.

As for me—speaking as one of the large, if not influential constituency, to which the Publican belonged,—which, in spite of you and yours, Heaven has not yet seen fit to disfranchise,—I never can think on these things without remembering the good Earl of Derby's words at that famous Scottish tournament, when the lance-

shaft was dragged out through skull and helmet, and the Ramsay never shivered or moaned,—

"Lo! what stout hearts men may bear. God send me as fair an ending!"

"It is all over now, and well over, Miss Verschoyle. I'm sure you are too brave to faint; especially if you remember, that there's not a drop of water nearer than the Lene."

The cold levity of Dering's tone seemed cruelly ill-timed just then; but the shock relaxed at once the tension of the girl's strained nerves; the little fluttering heart, after one painful throb, came back to a sense of its duties. Perhaps Georgie had never looked so dangerously bewitching, as when she raised her head, quickly, from its resting-place; her cheek flushed with excitement, and somewhat too with shame; surprise and reproach in her soft eyes—softer than ever now, as they glanced timidly through the veil of the long wet lashes.

So—with a bitterer jealousy gnawing at her heart—thought Ida Carew, who rode up at that instant. But with this there mingled a fierce thrill of pleasure, as she marked the contraction

of Dering's brow and the expression of his face; an expression not of satisfaction or triumph, but rather of patient suffering and steady resolve; such a look as you may often see, standing by a wounded soldier's bed, a minute after the surgeon's knife has gone sheer through nerve and bone.

It was only that last sight that enabled Ida to play out her part of friend and cousin so admirably; she was sympathetic without being sentimental, just sufficiently coherent in congratulation; neither too expansive in her praise of Dering's prowess, nor too sharp in the tender reproaches levelled at Georgie's nearly fatal self-will.

What the others said and did, is hardly worth recording. The Caliph was out that day, ridden by the groom, and Miss Verschoyle had no shadow of objection to a change of saddles. Indeed, it was with a sensation of security, and relief, and rest, like that of one who has just left a tossing skiff for the deck of a stout vessel, that she found herself on the back of her old favourite pacing soberly homewards.

CHAPTER VI.

IDA CAREW'S PASSION.

AMONGST the troubles to which wealth is heir, not the lightest, I think, are the pomp and ceremonial that needs must attend its alliances. The vagrant, whose purse is lighter than his heart, may add another versicle to the song of defiance that he chants in the face of peril or plunder; reflecting, that—whatever trials may await them hereafter—he can at least wed his Dorothea, so soon as the marriage licence is bought, without let or hindrance, or flourish of legal trumpets, or any other of the preliminaries, inevitable when one of the purple-clad mates with Dives's daughter. The post-nuptial paradise of such may well promise fairly; for the path leading to its entrance gate is very tedious and winding—more so than the issue, now-a-days.

For two mortal hours Philip Gascoigne had

been paying head-tax for his great possessions; listening and assenting to endless details of settlements and dower-charges, till, at last, in spite of courtesy and real interest in the matter, his pleasant face settled down into a helpless weariness. True it is, that the effect was much enhanced by the character of the man with whom Philip had principally to deal—rather a remarkable person in his way.

Solicitors, as a rule, I fancy, are rather a genial and jovial race, out of office hours; much given to hospitality, and avid of amusement of all kinds. The stiff, cautious legalist, who has been exasperating you with technical objections, till you wish yourself an outlaw for the nonce, will often surprise you with his rapidity of transformation, if you wait till the ominous black 'oak' has fairly closed behind him.

Mr. Serocold, in this respect, differed widely from his fellows. In his office he was disagreeable enough, certainly. Men of portly presence, well-to-do in the world, and excellent fathers of families, had been known to enter there, bearing themselves jauntily, with a comfortable self-confi-

dence; and to issue thence half-an-hour afterwards with a dejected mien, and a guilty sense of having been only just prevented by their severe adviser from wasting their substance, and wronging their children. But Robert Serocold seemed rather to stiffen than relax, when business was done.

He was unmarried, and lived always alone in a large brick house, not less rigidly repulsive than himself, in a Surrey suburb; where he ruled several parochial roasts, as perpetual churchwarden and poor-law guardian. In the latter capacity he had, of course, many opportunities of grinding the faces of his inferiors, and never let one of them slip; but he was not satisfied with these. He delighted in giving evening lectures, at the school-house, on the Improvement of the Labouring Classes, and other like subjects; which gave him an opening for indulging in fierce invective against drunkenness, improvidence, and worse vices yet: all of these he imputed freely to the puzzled frightened listeners, who sate shivering there, with a faint hope that their stern task-master would

remember their faces on the next board-day. He was very great upon the points of total abstinence from strong drinks, and punctual attendance at all church-services. There began and ended his ideas and suggestions for the improvement of the proletarian.

Mr. Serocold was a warm admirer (if he could be warm about anything) of the Dean of Torrcaster; and followed—not over-humbly—in the steps of that austere divine. The tenets of both belonged to the scarce dissembled Calvinism which lurks in the outermost frontier of Low Church; the acrid school of 'professors,' so liberal of threats and niggardly of promises; who would narrow the circle of the saved till they might be counted by thousands, and enlarge that of the lost till it became merged in infinity; the venomous fatalists, who, deeming their own salvation sure, would not spare to others one throb of Hell's agony; the preachers, who roll out the Commination with an unction as if they were cursing their mortal enemy; but who, when the round of duty brings them to Quinquagesima

Sunday, read the Epistle under grim protest, striving to rob the gentle words of half their meaning, by the harshness and hardness of their tones; thinking all the while within themselves that there is a taint of unsoundness in the theology of St. Paul. Truly, fitting followers of the gaunt Genevan, who, with a hateful smile on his thin lips, would have beheld Servetus' death-struggles in the fire.

It was no wonder, if Mr. Serocold's name stood high in his profession, though he had bought—not inherited his practice; and of his parentage or antecedents nothing was known. People felt themselves perfectly secure in the hands of the pitiless pietist; trusting him far more implicitly than they would have done a more genial adviser: indeed, it may be, that some of a timorous or nervous disposition were unconsciously trying to propitiate him, by an extra display of confidence.

When Gascoigne's old family lawyer died, Chetwynde recommended him to take Mr. Serocold.

"He 's so intensely disagreeable that he must

be safe," Paul said. "If you wanted to ruin yourself he wouldn't let you do it, merely out of the spirit of contradiction. He 's got a cool, long head, too, to give the devil his due. When that 5000*l.* legacy of my uncle Randolph's fell in, I gave it to him, with *carte blanche* as to investment. I don't think I could tell you where it is exactly—he has power of attorney and all that sort of thing—but it pays six per cent. regularly."

This was the man that sate, now, in the library of Marston Lisle; tall, grave, hard-featured, and pale; checking the current of his clients' liberality with staid objections and sharp reminders; fixing him, too, all the while with frozen gray eyes not a whit softened by a pair of blue steel spectacles; till poor Philip began to feel as if he were only tenant-at-will of his own property, and that will—Robert Serocold's.

Mr. Rule, the other solicitor, and Miss Verschoyle's representative, was a meek-spirited man, who would in any case have been over-awed by his tremendous brother-in-the-law; but,

in point of fact, he had little to do, but to assent admiringly to the magnificent settlements that Gascoigne proposed.

Mr. Serocold—in despite of a harsh-grating voice, and ungraceful delivery—was rhetorically inclined, and rather proud of his periods: it was in the middle of one of his best-turned sentences that the door opened quickly, and Paul Chetwynde entered, with a hurried step, very different from the lounging, lazy gait habitual to him. There were traces, too, of past excitement, still fluttering about his mouth and eyes. Those quiet faces when once thoroughly moved take time to settle again; just as a sheltered tarn, ruffled by some caprice of the wind, is slower to subside than the open mere where breezes wander at will.

The first glance at that face was enough for Gascoigne; he sprang up, with a frightened eagerness on his own, asking,—

"What has happened?"

Paul answered in his old placid deliberate way,—

"Nothing has happened, but—the best race

it has been my luck to witness. Miss Verschoyle can tell you all about it; and, Philip—if I were you, I should go and talk to her at once. She has this instant dismounted."

You may guess how long Gascoigne lingered. As the door closed behind him, Mr. Serocold spoke; since the sudden interruption the gravity of his expression had deepened into gloom, and his bushy brows were more markedly bent.

"You do not often act hastily, Mr. Chetwynde. May I ask your reason for calling Mr. Gascoigne away, when such important business is on hand, which must be transacted within a very limited time?"

The grand, austere manner, that had proved so useful with many of his weak-minded clients, only provoked a faint smile from the placid cynic, who stood, comfortably warming himself at the wood-fire.

"Ah, Serocold! how are you?" he said carelessly. "I hadn't time to salute you, when I came in. Yes—of course, I had good reasons for calling Gascoigne away. In common courtesy—if not in kindness—he ought not to delay

congratulating his affianced, on one of the most wonderful escapes on record. I shouldn't wonder if you were to call it a 'special interposition!' Would you like to hear how nearly all those deeds became not worth the parchment they are written on? And Gascoigne—if I know him—would never have given you a chance of drawing out other marriage-settlements. Listen, then."

So Paul, in a very few curt, graphic sentences, told them—what you know already.

Mr. Serocold lifted his eyes heaven-ward, and slightly raised his joined palms; much after the fashion of certain devotees when they ask a blessing before meat.

"The ways of Providence are indeed merciful and inscrutable!" he said. "I trust Miss Verschoyle has already given thanks, where thanks are chiefly due. If not——"

But it may be as well not to follow the fanatic further. It was one of the strange declamations characteristic of his school—half blasphemous, even if all sincere—where preaching mingles with prayer, and warning with self-

exaltation: you can fancy enough for yourself, if my sketch has at all enabled you to realise the man.

Paul Chetwynde heard it out, with a lip slightly curling, but not without a glimmer of approval in his eyes; just as he might have listened to any other performer who got through his part creditably.

"You are a most excellent lawyer, Serocold," he said; "but I've always thought you mistook your vocation. You would have been exceedingly powerful on the platform, and right hard to beat in the pulpit. I wish the Dean had heard those last few sentences; they're more in his line than mine; but—after my light—I applaud. I fear I must leave you now. If I may advise, you could show Mr. Rule (you might as well have introduced us, before proceeding to 'improve the occasion'), some of the beauties of Marston before the sun goes down. I don't think you've a chance of catching Philip again, before dinner: you'll have to finish him in the evening. Are you sure I can do nothing more for you? Till dinner, then."

So Paul lounged slowly out of the library; as if he had performed more than his share of vicarious hospitality, and was rather exhausted with the exertion.

But a pair of icy gray eyes followed him venomously, and something was muttered between two rigid thin lips, which was scarcely a blessing; every syllable of that careless banter was treasured up in a memory that never forgot or forgave; and, it may be, bore fruit in the after-time.

Men of approved hardihood have turned sick and faint ere now, when it was revealed to them that they had passed unconsciously along the verge of violent death, though the peril was passed. So, it was not strange, that Philip Gascoigne's gentle heart stopped beating, when he heard of the awful hazard that had threatened a life dearer than his own. He was too utterly unsettled for the moment, to notice the odd constraint in Georgie Verschoyle's manner, or the painful flush that often shot across her fair cheek, as she faltered and hesitated through her brief recital. His first intelligible words

were spoken—not to his love—but to his friend.

"Ah, Maurice!—how thoroughly right I was to trust her to you. Trust you? So I will always—in everything, and in spite of everything—through life and through death!"

The kind brown eyes were so very dim just then, that they never saw the dark trouble on Dering's face—no, nor the effort it cost him to answer lightly.

"My dear Philip—don't overwhelm me! Your own groom could have done as much as I, if he had been mounted as well. If there is any loose laurel about, The Moor, only, ought to be crowned. Didn't I tell you, last night, he was the best purchase I ever made? Queen Mab won't trouble you for some time to come. I'm much mistaken if that hock comes out sound to-morrow. But, if I were you, I should say a word in season to Mr. Paice before dinner. He deserves it."

Perhaps it was as well that Aunt Nellie and Mr. Carew came in so opportunely, to cover everybody's retreat with their demonstrative

congratulations and tender solicitudes: Ida had stolen quietly away, long ago. Of course, the chief thing they insisted on was,—that "Georgie should lie down till dinner-time." Feminine physicians prescribing for any disease, mental or bodily, however they may differ about particular nostrums, are generally unanimous in first making their patient supine.

No one was present at Philip's interview with his head-groom; but that worthy was 'beheaded,' with short and sharp shrift.

The master of Marston Lisle was easy to a fault with his dependents; nevertheless he was not disposed to look over gross ignorance or obstinacy—especially when they affected others than himself. It is probable that the dismissal was made easier by Mr. Paice's peculiar fashion of self-exculpation; for that agreeable person, when driven into a corner, had a rat-like habit of turning and snapping savagely.

Had these things happened beyond the Channel, Philip would certainly have saluted Maurice on both cheeks, after dinner, styling him his saviour and benefactor; and then have

'carried him in a toast.' But those who know how singularly undemonstrative is a well-regulated English household, both in its joys and its sorrows, will not wonder, if the last hours of that eventful day passed, very much like the ordinary evenings at Marston.

Miss Verschoyle did not seem at all nervous or depressed; but she was much more quiet and subdued than usual, and evidently not up to much conversation. So she nestled into the corner of a remote sofa; and there, half-reclining, gave herself up to the tender mercies of Aunt Nellie, whose talents in the petting line were always equal to the emergency.

Ida Carew established herself at the piano, and straightway won Mr. Rule's heart—soft in its mature autumn—by allowing him to turn over the leaves for her, and complimenting him on his sleight-of-hand. The honest elder was a musical fanatic, and the embers of romance still smouldered within him; he felt, for the nonce, translated into the body of one of those curled darlings of fashion whom he had often distantly admired: it was good to see him

casting side-glances at his awful colleague, whose social inferiority he could now afford to commiserate.

As the girl's sweet clear voice sank or swelled, there was not one strain or break in the melody, nor one false note in the sparkling fantasias or melting cadences, created by the caprice of her lissom fingers. Her cheek was, perhaps, a shade paler than its wont; but still inscrutable—ay—even to those keen eyes of Paul Chetwynde's, that watched her among the rest, over the pages of the *Revue* that served him as a partial ambuscade.

Gascoigne wandered from one group to another—he was ever the most courteous of hosts—with a kind or pleasant word for all; but he lingered oftenest and longest behind Dering's chair, who had been rash enough to match himself at piquet against Mrs. Carew. Each time that Philip leant over to look through the hand, or whisper a suggestion as to the discard, his hand would fall on his friend's shoulder, and rest there, in a mute but very meaning caress.

Yet Maurice shrank more than once from the light pressure of these gentle fingers, as if they had touched a scarce-healed wound; and at those times the same dark, set look of suppressed pain would sweep across his face, though it vanished again instantly. He fell into fits of abstraction too, that had nothing to do with the game, and it is needless to say, utterly failed to make a fight of it against his astute antagonist.

Mr. Serocold—solemn and solitary—digested a copious dinner after his own saturnine fashion; holding a 'Quarterly' in his hand, and keeping up the appearance of reading—as he did of every duty in life—most respectably. He sate apart from the rest, and interested himself in nothing going on around him; yet, somehow, he seemed to radiate gloom. With a grim satisfaction he saw the hour arrive, when he could decently venture to carry off Philip to complete the business that had been left undone.

Mr. Rule, of course, was compelled to follow: with a plethoric sigh, the good man issued forth

into his own arid legal world again, and heard the gates of Fairy-land close softly behind him—never to be unlocked again for him; at least, so far as this deponent knoweth.

The Tabaks-Parlement did not sit late that night, nor is the debate worth recording: nothing of importance could be discussed; for Mr. Rule was present in the stranger's gallery. Mr. Serocold, when Philip, as a matter of courtesy, asked him to join them, had declined with a look of holy horror, which was in itself a Counter-blast. He was a bitter anti-nicotian of course, and lost no chance of taking up his parable against the pernicious weed: had he been a clerk in the reign of the First James, he would certainly have attained a deanery; perchance, that of Carlisle.

If darkness and sleep settled down soon on all other chambers in Marston, in one room the lights burnt late, and the watching was long—the room in which Ida Carew lay; plotting and pondering; her busy head resting on the little hand buried in her braided tresses.

The perfect mask that fell for one second,

once before to-day, is quite laid aside now. The girl's features have settled down again into that same strange expression that utterly changes, if it does not mar, their beauty; a look that, I believe, is right rarely seen on the face of English maidenhood; but which may well have been worn by one of Catherine's fair wicked minions, as she sat musing without ruth or remorse, on what the morrow would bring; holding between her steady fingers *that* which must end at once her own mad jealousy and her rival's life—a pinch or two of shining grey powder, bought an hour ago at a hundred times its weight in gold—the latest devilry of René, the Queen's Poisoner.

Ida's lips kept moving perpetually; but for some time only broken syllables escaped them; indications of busy brain-work, just sufficient to prevent a cunning hunter of thoughts—had such been near—from quite losing the trail. But as she waxed more restless and impatient, some few connected words forced their way outwards.

"Georgie—darling Georgie—if you knew how I love you now; how I have always

loved you,—with your sweet baby-face, and soft eyes, and pretty coaxing ways! The luck has been yours since we were children; but the end is not quite yet, and, perhaps——. The end—how very near it came to-day. Just a few yards further——. I know, I know; she might have been lying now at the foot of the chalk cliff, and I no nearer what I strive for. Yet I wish—I wish——"

With all her cruel hardihood, and in despite of the bitter passion that possessed her, Ida Carew dared not finish that sentence aloud, or trust all her confession even to the night. But the small white teeth were clenched sharply and firmly, as the jaws of a steel-trap; and the viperine light in the contracting pupils glittered yet more dangerously. After a minute or two, she began to mutter again; then both her face and manner were softened; and a certain plaintiveness in her voice told that the fountain of her tears was not locked up for ever.

"No; I cannot hope. He would never think of love and me together; if Georgie were dead, there would always be another barrier. Geoffrey

is as much his friend as Philip. He would never be true to one and false to the other. He *was* true, to-day—my own Maurice—I saw his face when she lifted her's from his shoulder—it was so pale and pained; but always so honest and brave. I know he never said one wrong word, though she tempted him—as she *can* tempt. And he will go away—so far away—and die, perhaps, without ever guessing that I would follow him so gladly, and take all the burden of the sin and shame; and never grudge it, nor reproach him; no, not if he wearied of me at the year's end. He shall not go away—so. I will——And Geoffrey comes to-morrow. God help me! What *shall* I do?"

God help her—To what?

Evil as she was by nature, it is probable that Ida would have shrunk from that ejaculation, if she had realised its hideous blasphemy. But she uttered it quite mechanically.

There is nothing unnatural in this. We will not speak of those devotional assassins of Italy and Spain, who invariably attend mass when a grand *coup* is preparing; because they are be-

nighted Papists, you know, and steeped in vain superstition to the lips. But have you never heard an enlightened Protestant indulge in similar petitions, while meditating or practising things, that, if Heaven forgave, no more could be expected from its mercy? If not, you have been luckier than I.

However, with no other orison, Ida Carew laid down her tired head at last, and slept soundly till late in the morning.

O simple-minded sister of mine! You weary sometimes of the quiet monotony of maidenhood, and murmur in your innocent heart that the romance of life is long in coming. That sleeping girl might have forgotten already—and it would have been well for her—more than you are ever likely to know; yet, I think, you need not envy her her dreams.

CHAPTER VII.

PUNISHMENT PARADE.

MAURICE DERING rose on the following morning after restless, broken sleep, with a feverish sensation of discomfort and discontent, very foreign to his usual careless cheerfulness. Men of his habits and organisation, when anything has gone wrong with body or mind, resort to active exercise as the first panacea, just as naturally as a wounded deer takes to 'soil.' He thought he would try the effect of a brush before breakfast through the fresh autumn weather, and see whether The Moor was at all stale after his strong gallop: he generally superintended the horse's exercise since the training had begun.

While The Moor and a hack were being saddled, Dering lounged through the stables till he came to the box where Queen Mab was

standing. The first glance told him the state of things. The mare was resting her near hind-leg, and waving her head restlessly from side to side —evidently in pain, in spite of the wet bandages that swathed her hock from pastern to knee. The first real trial had told fearfully on her weak points; there she stood—dead lame; in all probability, not worth as many shillings as she had cost guineas.

"I thought how it would be." As Maurice spoke these words half aloud—thinking himself alone—there mingled with the compassion that every true horseman must feel for an animal in pain, the faint satisfaction of a judge, whose opinion has been justified by the event.

"Yer thought so, did yer?" a hoarse thick voice said behind him. "I hope yer satisfied, heveryway. I s'pose yer come to see me hoff the premises, now you've got me the sack?"

Maurice turned quickly on his heel, and there, close at his shoulder, was the bull-dog face of the discharged stud-groom—flushed with liquor even at that early hour—a glare of irrational fury in his blood-shot eyes.

"You had better take yourself off peaceably, before worse comes of it. I should not discuss the question with you, even if you were sober. I believe Mr. Gascoigne wanted no prompting to discharge you; if he had, I should have advised him strongly to do so. There's no safety in any stable—not even for life—where the head-servant is insolent, or ignorant, or dishonest, or a drunkard. One doesn't often find the four faults together; but they would all go into *your* character, if I had to give you one. Stand out of the doorway; I wish to pass."

If Mr. Paice's morning draught had been a little less potent, he would have been warned by the gathering darkness on Dering's brow, and by the compression of the lips—braced till the heavy moustache almost hid them—that he had gone to the very verge of safety. But he was nearly blind with drink and rage, and deceived, too, by the speaker's tone—exceedingly quiet and calm, though the words were the reverse of conciliatory. The crimson of his cheek deepened to purple, and the veins on his forehead swelled like whipcords, as he answered—

"Yer want to pass? Not afore I've given you another bit of my mind. Whose fault do yer s'pose it is, as that there mare's broke down? Why, a child might have ridden her, if it knew how to ride. So I'm to look for another place becos a young 'oman's got no hands. D—n——"

At whom the intercepted curse was levelled, can only be known to Mr. Paice's own conscience; for all further words were lost in a choking gurgle, as an iron grip closed round his throat, forcing him backwards through the open doorway. In the midst of his wrath, Dering remembered stable discipline, and forebore to use his whip, till they were fairly in the open yard. Once there—he shifted his grasp from the delinquent's neck to his collar, and the punishment parade began.

Now there are diversities of chastisements.

There is the chastisement fantastic: when, after a light stroke or two, that the flesh can scarcely feel, however they may gall the spirit, the patient is requested to consider himself horsewhipped—an utter impossibility sometimes,

unless he chance to be gifted with a vivid imagination. Again, there is the chastisement spasmodic: where the executioner loses his head after the first blow or two, and begins to hit wild; in this case the flurry and flustration bear an inverse proportion to the real work done; when all is over it is often difficult to say which of the two parties concerned is the more thoroughly exhausted and blown; and the spectator is irresistibly reminded of the Satanic comment on the shearing of the swine. Thirdly and lastly, my brethren, there is the chastisement proper—or judicial; not erring on the side of mercy, nor yet degenerating into brutality; where every blow descends with the deliberate emphasis of scientific strength; where the performer has sufficient self-control never to infringe on the two-score, if he has previously determined to administer forty stripes, save one.

Such a spectacle is not a pleasant one to witness, of course; but if the provocation has been intense, it may be—endured. The chiefs who gathered round Agamemnon, during that weary Decade of years, assisted, I fancy, at

scenes more displeasing to their heroic minds, than the punishment of Thersites.

Should these pages ever travel so far East as the heart of the Indian hills, and fail to find an echo in all other breasts, I think they will strike a memorial chord in that of a certain stalwart veteran, of whose prowess in this line (also exercised *in corpore vili* of an insolent groom), I, who write, retain a respectful recollection. O, fair-haired son of Milesius! Mighty wielder of the strident scourge! Wheresoever you may be—under roof, under canvas, or under the stars—*Waes hael!* I drain this cup in your honour, and—were it not superfluous—would wish "more power to your elbow!"

Mr. Paice had had considerable active experience in the punishment of boys and beasts; he soon discovered that he was in a very false position, or—to use his own vernacular—"had got into a real bad thing." He struggled—almost silently at first, for the dogged devil within him was not easily cowed—but he had no more chance of getting loose than if he had been lashed to the triangles; then curses,

mingled with uncouth prayers for mercy, gushed out with the foam from his working lips; and then all words were merged in hoarse howls of rage and pain.

Through curse, and prayer, and shriek, Maurice Dering smote on—neither moved at all to relenting, nor yet stirred to greater severity —till he thought the offence amply atoned. Then he cast the victim away, with the full force of his arm, flinging the whip after him, where he fell; and spoke, just as quietly as before, without a quickened breath or altered tone.

"*Now*, will you go? You might have known that as soon as you left Mr. Gascoigne's service, you were no safer from me than any other drunken ruffian who might choose to be insolent. You may take the whip with you, if you like; I'll never use it on an honest horse again: that's all the compensation you'll get from me, unless you choose to go to law about it. You've got a fair five-pounds' worth, I fancy.—Turn him out, some of you, if he's not outside the gates in five minutes, and send his traps after him to

the Gascoigne Arms. And, Harris, take The Moor out for walking exercise: I shall not ride this morning."

So, turning on his heel, without another look at the figure that lay rolling and writhing on the stones, Dering walked slowly away.

Painfully, at last, the stud-groom gathered himself together and rose to his feet; he shook his fist once, in stealthy menace, at the back of his chastiser; but spoke not a syllable aloud. He was wise enough to remember that every one of the stablemen who stood by, with triumph and satisfaction on their faces, had more or less been forced to endorse his brutal tyranny, and would like nothing better than to find an excuse for taking a share in reprisal.

Foremost in the knot of spectators was the bullet-headed boy afore-mentioned—every expression of his blunt features merged into a superhuman grin. Narrating these things to a village comrade, afterwards, said Jem—

"I got a many weltings from old Paice: that's sartain. But the Capting giv 'em back to him —the Capting did—all biled down into one."

So the great stud-groom departed incontinently and ingloriously, under cover of a derisive cheer from his late subordinates. He did not go to law: this moderation was easily accounted for when Philip examined his accounts afterwards, from curiosity (he had been too idle to do this at the time of the dismissal); they revealed a really remarkable system of comprehensive plunder, and a talent for cooking figures that would have done credit to a Quartermaster-general, or any other of the splendidly fraudulent officials who sit in the high places of Federaldom.

As Maurice Dering sauntered back to the house, which was at some distance from the stables, with a belt of high forest-trees between, he felt slightly contrite and ashamed of himself; not because he had yielded to a natural impulse of violence, but because the opening of the safety-valve had relieved him so intensely.

On the steps, before the great hall-door, stood Paul Chetwynde, bareheaded; drinking the fresh autumn air with evident relish: his eye ranged over the fair landscape with critical appreciation

and tranquil approval, much as if he had been looking at a master-piece of Turner or Claude Lorraine.

"Whence comes my Maurice, through the rosy dawn?" Paul quoted, as Dering drew near (it was close upon 10 A.M., but the speaker's habits were the reverse of matinal).

"I've been to the stables," the other answered, "meaning to see The Moor out before breakfast; but Paice upset my plans altogether."

"What on earth had *he* got to do with it?" Chetwynde asked, opening his eyes rather wider. "I thought he had ceased from troubling? Didn't Philip discharge him last night?"

"Certainly. But, you see, he wouldn't go quietly: he fancied I was the cause of his dismissal, and he had been drinking up to boiling-point besides. He was insolent—more insolent than you can imagine;—but I gave him a lesson he won't forget in a hurry. I never thrashed a man with a whip before; and I don't care to do it again: though Paice *did* deserve it."

Paul contemplated the stalwart speaker with a lazy admiration.

"How I envy people of active habits," he said. "Now you'll have an appetite at breakfast, *à faire frémir*, while Philip and I are trifling with our dry toast and muffins. It would have refreshed me exceedingly to have seen Paice punished. I've had a personal animosity against that man since I first set eyes on him, though I don't think he ever spoke to me. You'll want a biographer soon, if you go on with these exploits. There's sure to be some fresh parsley at breakfast: shall the women weave you a little athletic crown?"

"Don't say a word to them about it," Maurice broke in, anxiously. "I'm half ashamed of myself, as it is; I got up in a devil of a temper this morning; and, I'm afraid, I was only too glad to find something to vent it on. Bad form that—all over. It's full time for me to get away. I'm doing no good here."

Chetwynde gazed into his friend's eyes, wistfully, for several seconds, before he answered; and there came over his face a look of grave kindness, very different from its usual cynical indolence.

"So you still hold to your exchange?" he said. "I swear, I like you better for it. This home-service is a simple waste of energies like yours. York, and Dublin, and Brighton are good quarters enough; but there are pleasant places—and pleasant faces too—in the far East: and, for some constitutions, there's nothing like a thorough change of air. Maurice—I think it will do *you* good."

Then Dering knew that his secret was his own, no longer. Perhaps he would have chosen Paul Chetwynde out of the world as his confidant. Nevertheless, a sharp throb of pain shot through his heart just then: his cheek flushed dark-red, and he bit his lower lip, unconsciously, till the blood sprang.

"So *you* can't trust me?" he said, sadly. "I can't wonder at it, when I don't always trust myself. And yet——"

"How dare you say those words," the other broke in. "Trust you? I rely on your faith and honour, more than I do on my own. Maurice, I am not thinking of others, but of your own honest self, when I say—Go!"

The momentary flash of anger faded out of his keen blue eyes before Chetwynde had finished speaking, and they rested now with a loving earnestness on Dering's troubled face. For a minute or so, both were silent: then Maurice drew a deep breath, and spoke quite coolly and calmly.

"We won't talk about this any more. But, Paul, I'm so glad you know it all, and take it as you do. You must help me with Philip, you know. Poor old man! I think he'll miss me more than either you or Geoff. He would never get over it, if I went before the weddings came off. I must stay till after that, if possible. Don't you think so?"

"Decidedly," Paul answered: and so they went in together, without more words.

Of all the trials that put passive hardihood to sore proof, the sharpest, I think, is, when we are compelled to stand by, and see the thing dearest to us on earth, passing slowly into another's possession; being expected all the while not only to dissemble our own misery but to sympathise with the winner's happiness. It does not much

mend the matter, if he happen to be 'our trusty and well-beloved cousin;' or if the rivalry be only known to our own conscience.

Now mark, I pray you, how it stood with these two men. The one was deliberately condemning himself to another month or so of this bitter penance: the other approved and confirmed the resolution; simply because, had their positions been inverted, he would have done precisely the same. The act of self-sacrifice for a comrade's sake, appeared to both perfectly natural—if not easy. Yet both were tough, practical men of the world, without a spark of sentimentalism; not even endowed with peculiarly acute sensibilities: there were no more elements of a romantic hero in Maurice Dering's character, than might be found in that of most soldiers of gentle birth and breeding; surely, if Paul Chetwynde's best friend were seeking for an example of impulsive generosity he would have looked for it otherwhere than in that hard, cold, sardonic materialist.

Is it worth while to analyse these ethical anomalies—to settle by the Stagyrite's rule the

exact Attribute, that is the mainspring of the heart-machine, when it works eccentrically?

I think not. Life would be dull work without its little riddles—hard work, if we were bound to solve them all. Besides, every page of these sealed books will, perhaps, be laid open for us, if only we possess our souls in patience, until the dawning of a certain Day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPORTING PARSON.

THE clouds that seemed gathering round Marston Lisle vanished with Mr. Serocold, who made his adieux immediately after breakfast, with staid, freezing courtesy: not even then relaxing his tacit disapproval of the worldliness regnant there. As a matter of conscience, he declined to remunerate either the servant who had attended him, or the groom who drove them to the station; and punished his meek associate for paying double, by snubbing him at five-minute intervals all the way up to town.

When that grim Presence was once removed, every one appeared disposed to make the most of the bright October day. The womankind started about noon, to join the last croquet-party of the season, at a pleasant manor-house some ten miles off; and the men addressed themselves

to the depopulation of certain small covers and plantations that lay temptingly near at hand.

Philip Gascoigne was certainly not made of sporting stuff. He met the hounds when they were within easy distance, and the weather looked promising: few places in the country boasted a larger herd of game than Marston: but he hunted and shot, very much as he attended quarter-sessions—after a listless, languid fashion: not exactly bored; but still, evidently, discharging a duty of his social position. Of the other two, Chetwynde was an unvarying steady shot, Dering a very brilliant one; though he was hardly in his usual form that day.

The afternoon was far spent, and the hottest corner of several warm ones was nearly done. Maurice was standing alone, out in the open, about 50 yards from the edge of the belt (they let their birds rise fairly, and never butchered them at Marston): he was just drawing on a pheasant, almost out of distance, that was heading back up the cover, when a voice spoke close to his ear—

"A long shot—too long for clean killing.

There—I told you so: that's a strong runner, for money."

Dering's nerves were not easily startled: he pulled trigger just as steadily as if he had been still alone; and if the old cock fluttered down, instead of dying in the air, distance rather than change of aim was the cause. Then he turned and greeted the new-comer, laughing merrily.

"Why, Geoff, you're three hours earlier than we expected. I wouldn't say much about that cock, if I were you. Is that a new Devon fashion—speaking to a man on his shot? See the jealousy of these sporting parsons! They can't bear to see any one else kill, even when they've no gun in their hands. Take mine, old man; I know your fingers are itching for it; and I've shot till I'm tired. I suppose you found no one at home. The womenkind are all croqueting at Sele Abbey."

While Geoffrey Luttrell takes the offered gun —not unwillingly—and stretches himself preparatory to keeling over that brace of cocks that are coming up, high and wide; let us scan him over for a minute or so.

A sturdy figure, below middle height, square of shoulder and deep in chest, with brawny limbs, that are only kept down from fleshiness by habits of temperance and strong exercise. A healthy florid face, very pleasant to look upon; but too irregular in feature for any class of beauty, despite the advantages of a ready smile, superb teeth, and two broad blue eyes—not hard and cold like Paul Chetwynde's, but full of a warm genial light, though at times they might flash irascibly: all this is framed in portentous whiskers that only just escape the beard, of a redder brown than the strong close-cut hair.

The voice matches the face and figure right well—full, sonorous, and jovial; with a slight West-country accent, that brings back at once to the hearer memories of bare moorlands, heathy hills, bosky combes, and clear rivulets racing seawards—all ripple and sparkle and foam.

Truth to say, his attire—a suit of the correctest dark-grey—is about the most clerical attribute of the reverend man's exterior. Yet,

after his own fashion, Geoffrey Luttrell did his duty well: if other parish priests were more respected, few certainly were better loved. He had taken orders as a second son, and the family living; with no especial leaning to the profession, yet not sullenly, as by enforcement. When the death of his elder brother, childless, made him Head of his House—the lands were not broad, but the Luttrells had owned them through five centuries—he shifted his quarters from the Rectory to the Court, and took an old college friend as his curate: these were about the only changes in the Clerk-Squire's manner of life.

He had always given play to his robust organisation, by a liberal indulgence in athletics; a slashing unscientific hitter, and mercilessly swift bowler at cricket; a thorough rough-weather fisherman, both by land and sea; with an eye for a cock in thick uneven cover, renowned throughout North Devon. All these pursuits Geoffrey practised still; but not a whit more strenuously than when he was a parson in sole charge, with very limited means.

Strangers, who have only hunted occasionally

in those parts, will not be inclined to give our divine credit for much self-denial, in utterly abstaining from the hunting-field, though he subscribed liberally to the hounds. But for a native, even an unenclosed waste, with alternating perils of bog and boulder, has its attractions; perhaps there is as much excitement in a quick forty minutes over Dartmoor as in a burst of half the length from Lilbourne. It is fair to presume that Luttrell—a Devonian to the back-bone—would have enjoyed a gallop through the bracing moorland air not less than his fellows: so let us credit him with real scruples of conscience.

Though Geoffrey kept a curate now, he was by no means inclined to shirk his fair share of duty. The dwellings of the poor are widely scattered in those parts; but none, sick or needy, in that parish had long to wait, before the Rector came to help, not only with his purse but his prayers. He preached to his people once each Sunday, in strong simple words of his own; never descending to the vernacular, but never soaring above plain Saxon-English; he did

not attempt to frighten or bewilder his hearers, nor to drive religion into them, as it were, with a sword's point; yet he could speak sharply when there was occasion; wilful sin or shame was more likely to find mercy in the eyes of the austerest divine in the country-side, than in those of the sporting parson of Minster Combe.

And this man was about to trust his happiness to the keeping of the pious young person, at whose evening meditations and devotions you partially assisted awhile ago.

A curious conjuncture—if it were not so often paralleled. For, of a truth, scarce a day passes wherein one might not quote—

> Sic visum Veneri : cui placet impares
> Mentes atque animos sub juga ænea
> Sævo mittere cum joco.

It was easy to guess which of the twain was destined to honour and obey. Indeed, that question was settled already, and the wifely homage of the marriage service could only be a mockery now. Those honest impulsive natures are just as helpless in the grasp of a clever unscrupulous woman, as a strong wolf-hound in the

coils of a boa. It was so before history began: it will be so till futurity is fulfilled. The same spells that subdued the Demigod, the Assyrian, and the Jew are woven round many muscular Christians in this our day; it matters little whether the name of the sorceress be Omphalè, or Semiramis, or Delilah, or Ida.

The most provoking part of it is, that the thrall gets no more credit for submission from the enslaver, than if he had been born in serfdom. Power, of course, is the thing that all these 'fair Mischiefs' love most dearly; but it by no means follows, that the love is extended to the most faithful of their subjects. Remember I am not speaking now of true women, too proud to scheme for sovereignty, too generous to abuse it when attained; but of those, who will risk fame and fortune to gratify a passion or a whim, and accept the gift of a life's devotion with serene ingratitude. Clytemnestra will humble herself to the dust at the feet of the base-born Ægisthus, while she tramples under her own the faith and honour of Agamemnon.

When Ida Carew listened to Geoffrey Luttrell's wooing, it is probable that she fully calculated upon uncontrolled supremacy; this came with conditions of a 'good match,' just as the social position of her suitor might do. But if her heart—such a heart as it was—could ever have gone with her hand, it would have been given to a man strong enough to put bit and bridle on her wild nature, and wise enough never to let the reins quite out of his grasp; nor would she have liked him the less if he did, at times, draw the curb rather sharply.

As it was, she treated her betrothed, very much as the Beauty of a family treats

> The dozen tall Irish cousins,
> Whom she loves in a sisterly way.

That is to say, she was always pleasant and good-natured and amusing, but objected to transports of any kind. Without being actually repulsed or repressed, Geoffrey soon learnt that he must refrain from many familiarities that are usually sanctioned in courtship; unlimited osculation, or promiscuous caresses, were by no means allowed.

But he was of that happy disposition that looks ever on the silver side of life, and is content to trust to time to set all things even: if there were moments when he felt discomfited or disappointed, he shook off the chill before it could fasten on him, laughing at himself in his own hearty, jovial way.

So the future of these two might well be calm and prosperous if not brilliantly happy.

Very calm, too, was the grey autumn morning when we stood on the North Devon coast; and, looking seaward, marvelled that the bread-winners of Clovelly, and Bucks, and Hartland should turn homewards so early. There was no sign or omen of storm, save a jagged rim of cloud climbing the western shoulder of Lundy, and a murmur—less menacing than mournful—of the dusky sea. But, before the sun went down, the moan had deepened into a savage roar; there was thunder and rattle on Northam pebble-beach; and far away—white under the lowering rack—a broad, waved belt of foam showed where the surf-strife was raging on Bideford Bar.

CHAPTER IX.

A LOSING HAZARD.

You may suppose the greeting that ensued, when Chetwynde and Gascoigne joined the others. It was good to see the twinkle in the Parson's broad blue eyes—though he shook his head once, as a matter of form—when they made Maurice, very reluctantly, repeat the details of the morning's execution.

Truth to say, before he became a professional man of peace, Geoffrey himself had been a noted artist with the gloves. There was never in his big tender heart a grain of malice against any living creature; but, in his undergraduate days, that square, sturdy figure was always to be found in the front rank of the roysterers on the Ides of November. On one special night —a night that many now living well remember —when the Gown, heavily over-matched, was

giving ground in the Turl, till the flank of the enemy was fairly turned by the column debouching from Brasenose Lane—Luttrell had dined with the 'Phœnix;' and fought shoulder to shoulder with the valiant Cyclops who led that famous charge.

So, at last, you see the Quadrilateral complete.

Whatever these four men might be—taken singly—it is certain that, standing together, back to back, they made up a formidable rallying-square.

The meeting of the betrothed would, probably, have been a very quiet affair, even if no one had been by to witness it. As it took place in public—the womenkind were loitering about the Terrace when their cavaliers returned—neither party could claim much credit for their undemonstrative manner. Yet Ida drew back, rather more quickly than usual, from the light brow-kiss, though it was almost a formal salute; and her cheek flushed angrily, when, a second afterwards, her eyes met Maurice Dering's.

Neither could she, with all her self-control,

prevent her glances from straying furtively in that same direction during the brief *tête-à-tête* with which she indulged her lover in the course of the evening. She listened to all that he had to tell with her wonted show of good-natured interest; but sometimes answered at random. A keener observer than poor Geoffrey would soon have seen, that her thoughts, as well as her eyes, were wandering. Yet when that great honest heart was beating closest to her own, Ida never flinched or faltered in her set purpose.

What that purpose was, you will know very soon, if you have not guessed it already.

For the next three days things went pleasantly and smoothly as usual. Between Miss Verschoyle and Dering there might still have been a shade of awkward consciousness that would have caused either to avoid an interview *en champ clos;* but it was not grave enough to make the position painfully embarrassing.

On the fourth morning, Gascoigne was obliged to go to the neighbouring county-town on sessions business; the other three men were to

shoot some small belts and clumps in the park. Soon after luncheon the two girls walked out to join them, and stayed chatting and looking at the shooting (at a decent distance) till late in the afternoon. When the last clump was cleared, there was still some daylight left: several snipe had been seen lately about the low grounds and river-meadows; his Reverence, still insatiate of sport, would not consent to leave the poor passage-birds in peace; so—with a slight apology, which was easily accepted—he set off with the head-keeper to try his luck; leaving his friends to escort the damsels home.

The *quartette* seemed to pair off by tacit consent: if there was any pre-arranged plan, it was certain that the contriver had kept it to herself, and that the others were quite innocent of connivance. Yet it so befell, that, after a little, Dering and Miss Carew found themselves considerably in the rear of the other two.

The walk home went winding through brushwood and fern, along the edge of the steep upland; they had just reached a point where a

sharp turn and some thick shrubs hid the foremost pair from sight, when Ida halted—saying, in her usual quiet tones—

"Is not *that* worth looking at?"

It was of the landscape she spoke, which indeed did deserve more than a passing glance. The sun wanted yet a full hour of setting, but it had gone down behind a heavy bank of cloud, through the rifts of which pierced gleams and gushes of sombre, unearthly flame—wherein purple, and crimson, and orange, and many another prismatic tint beside—were mingled, like the strange radiance that struggles to the surface of fire-marble, or Labrador stone. The fair valley of the Lene was looking its loveliest just then; for the gorgeous autumn colouring was heightened everywhere, in fore and back-ground, by the marvellous effects of light and shade.

Dering stood silent for a minute or so—slightly in advance of his companion—gazing on the scene with a genuine admiration; his left arm resting on the muzzle of his empty gun, his right hanging listlessly by his side.

Suddenly, slender fingers stole round that right wrist, lightly, at first, as thistle-down, but always tightening their clasp; and a voice, low and sweet, though tremulous with unutterable passion, murmured in Maurice's ear one word—his own christian name.

Only one word. What of that? Have we not known orations, funereal or valedictory, that took days in the composing, hours in the declaiming, and yet were not half so eloquent as Astarte's farewell?

That little lissome hand, in despite of the fiery blood that was leaping through its blue veins, was soft and cool as white velvet; but under its touch the strong soldier shrank and shivered, as the Baron of Smaylhome's false wife may have done, when the dead adulterer's grasp scorched her to the bone.

After that, he stood still in his place, as if under some mesmeric spell; never turning his head, nor diverting his eyes from their fixed gaze, though surely they realised no one object, far or near. He did not hear the half of the broken syllables that followed that first word which

told him all. For Ida would not leave her self-abasement incomplete.

Not one of those syllables shall be written down here. It was necessary that the scene should be partially produced, because it is one of the main hinges of this story. But—in spite of all imputations to the contrary, past, present, and to come—I *can* say, in simple truth, that I would not wittingly linger over any ensample, real or imaginary, of woman's degradation or dishonour.

Do not suppose that while Dering stood thus, silent and still, he was struggling with any temptation whatsoever. If his heart had not been already filled with his hopeless love for another; nay, if she herself had not been contracted to his dear friend, there never would have been a corner in it for Ida Carew.

Maurice was not suspicious by nature, neither was he a particularly acute observer: he had not of course penetrated far below the surface of the dark tortuous character which had foiled even Paul Chetwynde: but he would never have been lulled into security like poor Geoffrey

Luttrell. Though the girl's manner was so haughtily indifferent, her temper seemingly so perfect, her affections so admirably distributed and controlled, the cold bright eye had said to Maurice, often and often ere this—

> Yet is there something dangerous within me,
> Which let thy wisdom fear.

So it was easy for him now to close his ears to the voice of the charmer. Indeed, he scarcely thought about Ida at all. For a few seconds there was upon him a horror, hard to describe; an awful apprehension of treachery and danger gathering under the feet of those whom he loved best on earth; mingling with a consciousness of having himself—wittingly or unwittingly—much to do with the laying of the mine.

It is only justice to him to say, that he felt not one thrill of gratified vanity at Ida's avowal. In some things he was wonderfully simple and single-minded. Indeed in these respects he rather resembled a certain honest friend of mine own—gifted with remarkable personal attractions —who is perpetually achieving small conquests

at first sight, and invariably declining to follow up the advantage. I remember well the meek reply, that once disarmed those who were bantering *ce bon Arthur* on such supineness—

"Well—I daresay you're quite right. Only —you see, I don't go for 'killing.'" He meant 'lady-killing.'

When Dering turned, at Ida's last passionate appeal—"at least to answer her—only one word,"—his frank face had grown strangely dark; darker than when, four days ago, he began to chastise the insolent groom. But he used no more force than was necessary, to draw his wrist gently out of her clasp; and his voice was rather sad than stern. Indeed, he was speaking rather to himself than to Ida:—

"If Geoffrey knew this, I believe it would kill him."

In good sooth she *was* answered. If one little flame of hope still flickered in the girl's breast, it was quenched then utterly, for ever.

One night, some forty years ago (an eye-witness told me all this), in the card-room of a certain club, a ring of lookers-on were gathered round

the table, where a match at piquet was proceeding, for stakes exceptionally high even in those days when giants gambled. Fortune was steady against one of the players; a tall handsome man, with a fine thorough-bred face terribly worn by hard living and late vigils. There was one small red stain on his elaborate *jabot* (our grandsires, you know, were gorgeous in fine linen), where a drop of blood from his lower lip had fallen. That was the single sign of annoyance he betrayed from first to last of the long sitting. Indeed, his manner was far more gay and careless than that of his opponent; and his occasional laugh at some extraordinary phase of ill-luck did not seem forced or unnatural. Yet, with every deal of the cards, the Shadow was closing round that man, faster and nearer; the letters were lying at home, directed and sealed, that told those who cared to hear, how he had gone out that night determined, one way or another, to settle accounts with the world; and, four hours after, as the grey March morning was breaking, they drew him out of the mud of the Serpentine, dead and cold.

Somewhat similar was Ida's case. She had resolved on the venture, not without counting the cost; she knew that, on the one side was a desperate chance of winning—on the other, fruitless humiliation—a very suicide of honour. So, now that the game was lost, she stood prepared to pay that which was owing to the uttermost; asking no favour, attempting no evasion. Before Dering had finished speaking, she was far calmer than he.

"I must have more sins on my soul than I knew of," Maurice went on—"or these trials would not be sent. How am I to answer you? I would not say one harsh or cruel word; but it must be best, not to lie. I must tell you, that if there had been nothing binding you to Geoffrey—nothing that makes it baseness in me to listen to any such words as you have spoken—there could never have been any link stronger than friendship between you and me. I cannot tell why—but I feel it is so. You have power enough over men, to bear hearing the truth, for once. And I cannot thank you, either. God forgive you"—there was a sob in his strong clear

voice. "Do you know what you have done? Do you know how long it will be before I shall look Geoffrey Luttrell in the face, without shrinking like a traitor? You are no true woman, or, in pity, you would have spared me this."

He wronged her there. With all her sinfulness upon her, it *was* a true woman that answered Maurice then, with a voice and eyes far steadier than his own. A true woman—because, when shame or sorrow hung over the man she loved, her first impulse was to bear her share of the burden—and more.

"How can you speak so?" Ida broke in. "You a traitor—you, who have never by look or word encouraged my madness—who have been brave enough to speak the hard, honest truth, even now? What could Geoffrey blame *you* for, if he knew all? The treachery and shame is mine—all mine. I feel neither now, whatever I may feel in aftertime. Maurice, I will never repent having spoken to-day. I would rather that you trod my love under your feet, than that you should go away and never know it was yours. But I will never speak again, till

I die. Ah, don't turn your head away again, without saying, that you will forgive and forget."

Perhaps, in all her life, Ida Carew had never looked so lovely as she did at that moment; before the passionate flush had quite faded on her cheek, or the eager fire in her eyes. Not one spark of admiration was kindled in Dering's heart; nevertheless it melted marvellously, as she gazed up into his face with a faint, timid smile, more piteous than tears.

"I spoke far too harshly," he said; "and selfishly, too. What am I, that I should judge you? Nay, I will not have you judge yourself too hardly. Perhaps no real harm need happen after all. You are very young, and we all know the fate of most girlish fancies. Years hence, when you are a steady chaperon, and I a battered veteran on half-pay, we may laugh over this one."

Ida saw the effort it cost him to speak thus lightly, and seconded it bravely: it was not all bad in her, you see. She cast her eyes down, lest he should see in them reproach or denial; knowing all the while how long it would be

before *she* would smile, remembering that 'girlish fancy.'

"I daresay you are right," she said, softly. "At any rate, be sure Geoffrey shall not suffer. I will do my very best to make him a good wife, and strive my uttermost to love him as he deserves; just as if this madness of mine had never been. Fever-fits do good sometimes, they say; and perhaps this one may turn me, a little sooner, into a sober, sensible matron. You will trust me so far, I know; and keep my secret, always?"

Dering's face brightened wonderfully. That good Maurice! In a case like this, he was as easily hoodwinked as a child.

"I do trust you, heartily," he said, "and I am too glad to do so; for if it were otherwise, my lips would be sealed. It is the simplest question of honour."

The bright fathomless eyes looked up into his face again, with a wistful earnestness.

"Thanks—so many thanks," she whispered; "and I will keep *your* secret too."

The dark-red flush, that always showed when

he was much provoked or moved, mounted to Dering's brow: he struck the butt of his gun sharply on the ground, as he turned half aside with a short bitter laugh.

"So you have found me out too? I gave Paul's sagacity more credit than it deserved. I'm worse than a schoolboy in his first passion. I suppose my face has been telling tales?"

"Only once," she said. "On Monday last, in Harlestone Chase. I guessed something before; but I was never sure till then. And Georgie—does *she* know?"

In spite of all Ida's self-command, a tremulous eagerness in her voice betrayed her interest in that question.

"I hope and trust not," Maurice answered. "Some wild words broke from me—I can't recall one accurately—just before I got alongside of her, when I saw she was going to throw herself out of the saddle. But I don't think she could have heard; or, if she did, that she has remembered. Wittingly, I have never made the confession to her, or to any other; and, by God's help, I never will."

A sudden gleam of crimson light, shooting through the cloud-pile in the West, fell full on his earnest face as he spoke these last words. With the firm resolve, there was mingled a certain reverence and devotion, such as you may see in a picture of old-time chivalry; showing how the good knight took upon himself the Vow, that could only be achieved through travail, and privation, and peril of death. Ida thought she had never loved him thoroughly till that moment. But no sign of emotion escaped her, save one long, low, painful sigh; so for a few seconds, there was silence again, broken by Maurice.

"We need never speak of these things again," he said, gravely, but very gently. "There is no danger of misunderstanding between us henceforth. I do hope, we may still be good friends; at least, forgive me if I have said a harsh or rude word to-day. I've been rather sharply tried of late, you know."

He held out his hand with the kindly courtesy that made his manner so winning; and Ida held it just long enough to return, decorously, its

honest pressure. Their eyes met for a moment or so—steadily enough—but the girl's sank first.

"Let us go now," she murmured, "it is more than time; and never a word again of what has passed to-day. But, Maurice, remember!—friends—friends always."

It may be that at the moment she spoke in sincerity. But when natures, opposite as those two, shall be joined in honest, harmless amity, the day will have fully come, when the wolf shall lie down by the lamb; and the asp's tongue, innocent of venom, shall lick the lips of the sleeping child.

So that strange pair walked slowly homewards. To the credit of both be it recorded, that they were able to talk on more than one indifferent subject before they reached the terrace, where the other two leant over the balustrade, also admiring the sunset. That same sunset easily excused their own delay; both Ida and Maurice looked perfectly calm and unconscious, when they met the scrutiny of Paul Chetwynde's eye.

Now, it will appear to many grossly improbable, that an English damsel of good birth and breeding, should have so far forgotten maidenly dignity and reserve, as to cast her love, unconditionally, at the feet of a man who had never offered her more than the common courtesy and kindliness justified by long familiar intercourse. Some of these sceptics may possibly be not a whit behind their fellows, in the ordinary *curriculum* wherein worldly wisdom is learned.

I know that such instances of moral depravation and social aberration are extremely rare. But I know, too, that in the memory—if not in the conscience—of more than one reader of this page, there will rise up a silent witness to the evil truth, that—such things *have been*.

CHAPTER X.

DESDICHADO.

EARLY in the afternoon, some ten weeks later than the time we have been speaking of, a party of four, including the host, sate, after a late breakfast, smoking the digestive cigar in Paul Chetwynde's chambers.

They were very pleasant chambers; the look-out over the Green Park was endurable even on that chill November day; the furniture was rich and well-chosen, though not too costly for comfort; there were none of the precious trifles lying about that adorned the *tabagie* at Marston Lisle, but scarcely any appliance of luxury or laziness had been forgotten. Through the folding-doors, half covered by a heavy *portière*, you may catch a glimpse of a dining-room, panelled in dark oak, relieved by gilt mouldings and four admirable cabinet-pictures; it is the

very size for a select party, and you begin to fancy there may be some truth in what people say—'If Chetwynde prides himself on anything, it is on his little dinners.'

Of the three guests we will take Gerald Annesleigh first; purely on physical grounds; for on any other, he certainly would not deserve priority. It is almost impossible to pourtray, with the pen, an exceptionally handsome person of either sex: I will not attempt it now.

Fancy a face, in which every feature was not only perfectly moulded, but harmonised perfectly with the rest; large lustrous eyes, in which the sleeping light was very easily awakened; dark glossy hair, carefully trained down to the uttermost curl of the wonderful mustache; a slight figure of admirable symmetry, inimitably graceful even in repose,—and you will have some faint idea of that wicked Prince Charming.

Truth to speak, Gerald Annesleigh has, from youth upwards, consistently abused his advantages of mind and body, on a scale that few men have a chance of imitating. Indeed, he has been going down-hill with a steady rapidity, ever since he

began life as a Cornet of Dragoons, with good introductions, a fair allowance, and excellent expectations. All these he had exhausted long ago, except indeed the last, which he could not get rid of, though they were worked nearly threadbare now; for he was heir to the title and estates of his uncle, the childless Earl of Dumfermline, who abhorred him above all living things, and had worried a whole firm of lawyers out of their patience, by driving them to look for a loophole through which the law of entail might be evaded.

The Earl had ceased for years to make his reprobate nephew any regular allowance; but Gerald used, from time to time, to wring out of him sums, more or less considerable, by putting on the screw of some disgraceful exposure, that would blacken yet more an already tarnished escutcheon. Annesleigh himself was famous for his cursing; but upon these occasions, it may be doubted if the reverend senior did not match him in eloquence of malediction.

"Unfortunately," as Gerald remarked one day, "the Emperor is of a spare habit and lives

low; or I'd taken short odds about apoplexy before this."

He had never yet appeared before the criminal bar of an offended country; but from all other courts he was seldom long absent. Of course few fathers of reputable families would allow Gerald to darken their doors; yet he had never been detected in any of those misdemeanours that exclude the sinner from the pale of society, at once and for ever. For instance, there were ugly gambling stories about him in half the countries in Europe; but no foul play had ever been brought home to him; on the only two occasions when he had been involved in a quarrel at cards, he had contrived to throw the blame upon his adversary, besides shooting him with infinite promptitude and dexterity. So he had gone on—and was likely to go on—for many seasons; treading lightly and gracefully along the slippery verge of the chasm, at the bottom of which lay deadly dishonour, if not death.

Almost the prettiest picture I can remember, is one, representing a fair child, about five years

old, nestling close to the knee of a very beautiful woman, looking up at her from under wavy brown curls, with a glance, half playful, half loving. That child was Gerald Annesleigh; that woman, his mother—dead—through God's mercy, years ago; ay, before her darling's locks were shorn, before his glorious eyes had learnt to lie.

In characters utterly base, or wicked, or cruel, these paradoxes are often found. The Eleventh Louis, you know, never stirred without his leaden Madonna; Cenci, I doubt not, was confessed and shriven occasionally; and Couthon's spaniel was as well known in the Terrible Days as her master. So, perhaps, it was not strange, that Annesleigh could never be persuaded to sell that picture, though he would raise money on it unscrupulously.

This peculiarity was once remarked upon by one of those benevolent gentlemen who succour the distressed aristocrat with a temporary loan, on the deposit of some article of value, when personal security is not quite negotiable; this, in spite of his reversionary prospects, was often the

case with Gerald, when he required money at a minute's notice.

"The first time as that picter came to me," Mr. Simmonds said, "I offered a tidy sum for it,—right down. It aint often you get hold of such a bit of colouring now-a-days. The Captain had been dreadful hard hit on the October Meeting, and wanted cash for The Corner—bad. But he d—d me as handsomely as ever I heard him—the Captain's language is *very* moderate you know, sir, when anything puts him out, and told me—'to keep my huckstering to myself, if I wanted to keep his custom; that I didn't know my own business neither, for it was the best pledge I ever took.' He was right, too. I've had that one a many times, but I never keep it long. I remember, that time he took it away the day after the Houghton settling."

When the poor painting was *at home*, it lived always in a deep recess, over which a thick curtain could be drawn at pleasure; so that the image of the dead lady was not compelled to look on the orgies of drink or play, or darker debauches yet, which had gotten for those rooms such a

terrible name. The most reckless of the female dare-devils, who make a mock at all holy things, human or divine, never ventured, a second time, to peer behind the veil.

That small, spare, silent man, with wrinkled, bloodless cheeks, thin, pale hair, and a meek, chronic smile, is Gerald's *umbra*—Penrhyn Bligh.

He inherited from his father an honourable name, a fair competency, and a weakly constitution. The two first he got rid of some time ago; and is trying sedulously to dissipate the relics of the last, by late hours, and constant devotion to the shrine of Absynthia Mater. Annesleigh was the prime—if not the sole—cause of the poor little creature's ruin. But, so far from bearing any malice thereanent, Penrhyn attached himself at once to Gerald's fortunes, and serves him still with a ready fidelity, believing that there is nothing alive equal to that superb Bohemian. We all know how Bertrand fares, when he is squire to Macaire. Nevertheless, Penrhyn is always helplessly miserable when not supported by his patron's countenance: he

is quite content to accept more than his share of their common discredit, so that he may bask in the reflected light of the other's evil triumphs.

It would be hard to say, how Annesleigh himself feels towards his unhappy dependent; he treats him with a sort of contemptuous good-nature, and will not allow anyone else to bully him; but never thinks it necessary to express any gratitude for the services he accepts, or any regret for the ruin he has made. It has been said, that there is no dislike more bitter, than that which the injurer nourishes against the irredeemably injured; but, when conscience is utterly seared, perhaps this sentiment is crushed into inactivity with the rest.

Next to Penrhyn Bligh—almost eclipsing the meek little *umbra* with his portly presence—sits the Great O'Neil, once a major of Carbineers, now a peaceful J. P. and D. L. in his native Corkagian county.

A tall, burly man, who carries his sixty years right gallantly; with a moist, merry eye, and a bold soldierly look still about his face, though his mustache was shaved when his papers

went in, and his thick grey whiskers are carefully trimmed in orthodox 'cutlet'-fashion. There is a rich, racy roll in his voice, scarcely amounting to a brogue, just sufficient to round off more mellifluously the magnificent periods in which the Major delights to indulge. He has a very vivid imagination, and a keen sense of humour; but is so intensely good-natured that he seldom 'chaffs' much; and would rather invent an absurd story against himself than against his neighbours any day.

So much for the company. Now for a specimen of their converse, though it is not particularly important or interesting. But it was necessary to bring these fresh personages before you, inasmuch as one of them, at least, had much to do with the fortunes of those whom you know already.

They were talking about the double marriages of Gascoigne and Luttrell, which were to come off in the ensuing week. The *venue* was fixed some miles from town; for, though Lady Verschoyle had consented to creep out of her warm winter-nest to see her daughter given away, she

would by no means encounter the perils of a London November.

"Well, I do call it hard lines," Gerald was saying—"I don't often care about going to church, or into *very* reputable society: here I've a chance of doing both at the same time. Why, I should live for a month afterwards in the odour of respectability, if not of sanctity. And Paul won't help me. Look now: I'll make a compromise, just for once: I'll leave my poor Pen. behind. What do you say?"

"That would make a great difference, certainly," Chetwynde answered, with a half sneer. "But, even so, I don't think there would be room for you. A double marriage is a serious thing; at least a hundred people will have to be left 'out in the cold,' who have a better claim than you, my virtuous Gerald. Why, you hardly know Philip at all, and his bride but very slightly."

"*Very* slightly,"—the other said, just a shadow of a sneer gathering about his voice, and a wicked light glimmering in his eyes—"of late years, at all events. But I met the little Verschoyle down at Torquay, before she came out (I was hunting

that fat Cumberland heiress, who married the crooked Indian man—cruel case, it nearly broke Pen.'s heart)—they didn't look so sharp after her then. She was quite the nicest thing I ever knew. After she was presented, we went each our own way. That Carew woman fights very shy of me, and she's got eyes in the back of her head, I believe; besides, I had a good deal of business on hand just then. But I travelled a hundred miles to see her at her first ball; and I've a fancy to see her at her wedding."

"You'll have to baulk it this time," Paul retorted rather sharply. "I was not aware that your acquaintance with Miss Verschoyle dated back so far. It's another reason for your being left out next week. I'm inclined to believe in the luck of auspices. It would hardly be giving a bride a fair chance, if she took the vows under that evil eye of yours."

The good-natured O'Neil interrupted them here. The signs of impending storm were plain to read; for Chetwynde's face and lips were set ominously; and Annesleigh's smooth white brow had begun to lour.

"Well, it beats me entirely, that whim of witnessing weddings"—the Major was great at alliteration—"It's a sort of morbid monomania, I verily believe, like visiting vivisection-rooms. Gerald, ye born imp, what business have you dabbling in holy water? I'd sooner go to a friend's funeral than to his marriage, any day. His troubles are ended in one case: in the other they're just beginning."

His audience smiled expectantly. Upon no subject did the Major wax eloquent so readily as on his own matrimonial troubles: he would descant upon these for hours together, with a bitterness not altogether comic or feigned. The partner of his bed and board was indeed a very awful lady—a sort of refined and dignified Xantippe—who tried her utmost, at all times and seasons, to keep the mercurial veteran below 'boiling point,' with very variable success.

The O'Neil nodded his head thrice, solemnly; settling himself in his huge arm-chair, into a *pose* between the didactic and the oratorical.

"It is, now, almost a quarter of a century," he said, "since I proffered to a highborn female

the priceless treasures of my heart and hand. For all these years, without fear or favour, have I been fighting the battle of the Henpecked Husband against odds that no bachelor can realise. You see the lines on my manly cheek, and think they're the wrinkles of increasing age. No such thing. You look on a brow like the brow of Prometheus;—scarred by Mistress O'Neil's thunder. Now, I'm not a reprobate, like one of yourselves. I have troubled the peace of no man's household; I never gamble beyond 'golden crowns;' and I carry my drink genteelly. But I object, on principle, to going to bed till I feel sleepily inclined. On the question of free-agency here, there broke out, five-and-twenty summers ago, a war that will only terminate with the existence of the belligerents. I've known that villain Gerald, forgetting the respect due to grey hairs, banter me on going home so early, when it wanted but an hour to dawn. Irreverent scoffer! Did ye guess at the retribution of the morrow? I read 'Zanoni' when it first came out; but I never realised its power till one night when I forgot

my latch-key. When the door opened, there—tall and white against the black back-ground—stood the apparition of Mistress O'Neil. If Clarence had not shrunk before The Watcher on the Threshold, he would have owned a bolder heart than mine."

The Major stopped to take breath here, and drew his handkerchief across his forehead, as if the bare recollection had brought back the sweat of fear.

"You temporise sometimes, I fancy," Paul remarked, with a palpable 'drawing' intention. "I've heard of excuses——"

The O'Neil drooped one lid, for a second, over a merry twinkling eye: it was a masterpiece of winking.

"Excuses?" he said. "Don't you know what happened a month ago, in the smoking-room at The Rag? Musgrave had just come back from India, and gave a dozen of us a right good dinner. About four, I made a move to go. Anstruther was next to me—you know the pretty, smooth girl's face: there's the making of a man in him, for all that.

"'Why, you're not going yet, Major?' he lisped out. 'You've a capital excuthe to-night; friends don't come back from foreign, every day.'

"I turned upon that unlucky youth with an inexpressible dignity of rebuke.

"'Sir,' said I, 'five years before your excellent mother was married, I began trying experiments on feminine credulity in the person of Mistress O'Neil—*née* Macdonald. And you presume to suggest an evasion to *me!* Tarry at Jericho till your beard be grown.'

"I don't think the child slept sound in his cradle that morning."

Even Penrhyn Bligh joined heartily, for once, in the laughter which rewarded the Major's tirade. Annesleigh had quite recovered his good humour. Indeed, he was too wise to quarrel with a useful acquaintance, such as Chetwynde had shown himself ere this, about what was really only a whim.

"Well, I give it up," he said. "The fair Georgette must receive my blessing at second-hand. By-the-by, who's going to be Gascoigne's best man?"

"Dering, of course," Paul answered. "I'm to squire the reverend Luttrell."

"Dering of the —th; the riding man, you mean," Gerald went on. "I hope to G—d he won't go flirting or feasting too much, or do anything to shake his nerve in the week after. I shall back his mount in the Grand Military for pounds, shillings, and pence."

So, they fell to racing talk, through which we have no need to follow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST TEMPTATION.

On the fourth day before the marriage, Dering rode down to Carhampton, where Lady Verschoyle and her daughter were staying. Gascoigne, who had been called suddenly away to Marston, had entrusted him with certain final arrangements; Maurice had also an errand of his own; he brought a wedding-gift for Georgie.

It was rather a gorgeous souvenir to come from a modest captain of horse—a broad, heavy band of flexible gold, with a medallion in purple enamel, bearing the initials of bridegroom and bride, interlaced in an intricate monogram of brilliants.

Lady Verschoyle was confined to her room with one of her nervous headaches, so the demoiselle received her visitor, alone. It was the first time they had so met, since the day of the

race on Harlestone Chase. During all this time there had subsisted between them, as I said before, a certain reserve and reticence, though this had been gradually becoming more and more one-sided.

Indeed, such a state of things did not suit the fair Georgie at all. When she had once been on a confidential footing with any one, she by no means approved of the relations being changed into distance or formality. Her friends and adherents said this was "because she was a dear affectionate little thing;" her rivals and detractors imputed it to coquetry, pure and simple. Perhaps both were partly right.

In the present case, she thought that she had done quite penance enough for that moment of yielding to an imprudent impulse, and that it was full time Maurice should take his place again in the inner circle of her favourites. With all this, she felt not a shadow of disloyalty towards her affianced; indeed, she liked Philip better and better as the hours grew nearer when he would claim her as his very own; for scarcely a day passed without her having to note some mark of

delicacy, or generosity, or kindness, on the part of her lover.

These anomalies are marvellous, I own; but they are not uncommon. Indeed it is one of the most curious of physiological studies, to remark how very close to the wind a thorough-paced coquette will sail, without any defined purpose of evil; nay, without any rash intention of risking shipwreck.

I say all this, to explain my poor little heroine's conduct on this especial afternoon—not to excuse it; for in truth she did behave with extreme naughtiness.

When Georgie had finished her raptures and thanksgivings—they were rather more gushing than the real beauty of the gift could justify—there was an awkward silence for a minute or so: she kept her eyes fixed on the bracelet as she turned it backwards and forwards on her slender wrist; all the while the delicate rose-tint rose brighter and brighter on her cheek; at last she spoke, low, and, as it seemed, nervously, still looking downwards.

"I shall value this more than any one of my

presents. Do you know why? I take it as a peace-offering; though that ought not to have come from *you*. Don't deny that, for weeks past, you have thought me stupidly cold and ungrateful. I don't wonder at your being vexed and disappointed, till you became formal too."

Now here I appeal to the memory of my masculine readers to answer, whether some of the most complicated scrapes and painful interviews in which they ever were involved have not begun with some such self-accusation on the part of the Fair Penitent, accompanied by an imputation of animosity to her victim? Disclaimers and denials of ever having taken offence, are worse than vain; they simply recoil upon yourself from the plaintive obstinacy they encounter.

Dering was cool and self-possessed enough on most occasions, and of late had been looking his position very fairly in the face; but this was rather more than he had schooled himself to meet. For a moment or two he was cruelly embarrassed; it did him some credit, that he should have recovered himself so soon. But he

was not inventive or sagacious enough to steer clear of the aforesaid useless denials.

"I assure you, you are utterly wrong," he began. "I have nothing on earth to complain of. What can have put such a fancy into your head? My dear Miss Verschoyle ——"

She interrupted him here; her full scarlet lip was pouting slightly, and the quick, petulant movement of her delicate foot kept time with her tongue.

"There, you *will* always use that formal address, though I do hate it so. Everbody that I like, and that likes me, calls me 'Georgie.' You are the most ceremonious of all the rea_ friends I have. And yet, you are like an elder brother to Philip; and I—owe you my life."

He answered her instantly, with a laugh rather cold and constrained."

"I didn't know you had such an antipathy to your surname. Now I think it such a very well-sounding one. You change it, and I start Eastward ho! so soon, that it seems hardly worth while to familiarise. I'll ask Philip what

he thinks about it, if I come home again safe and sound."

"But you did call me 'Georgie' *once*, you know."

The beautiful eyes were lifted now, though somewhat coyly; and there shot through the silky lashes just one gleam of purple fire.

It was a home-thrust, certainly, and for the moment Dering's self-command was staggered; the effort it cost him to regain it made his face seem hard and stern.

"I won't affect to misunderstand you," he said, darkly. "I hoped you would not have remembered a syllable spoken then. I believe that words uttered at such a moment ought never to be brought against one, in this world or the next. But they deserve some penance. *Now*, perhaps, you may guess why I have borne myself towards you, somewhat distantly and formally. Trust me, it is better that we should bury every memory attached to that terrible day —bury them for ever and ever. You may write 'All's well that ends well,' on the tombstone."

The grave earnestness of his voice and manner

—without a tinge of bitterness, unless it were levelled against himself—utterly quelled the *diablotin* of coquetry in Georgie's breast. (I here repress a strong temptation, to illustrate by Ithuriel.) It was a line of defence she was quite unused to encounter, and it baffled her completely. Like most women of her stamp, she was very slow, on such occasions, to realise the harm she did or the pain she inflicted. Nevertheless, a vague misgiving did overcome her now, that she was wringing and torturing a brave honest heart that had always wished her well and been ready to serve her, merely to gratify the girlish vanity of successful fascination. She began to feel frightened and remorseful.

Before she could falter out a word, Maurice spoke again—still very gravely, but in a tone perceptibly softened.

"I think it better to end this, once for all, since so much has been said already. Pray believe that I speak now, exactly as I would if Philip's hand were resting—where it has rested so often—on my shoulder. You know how he trusts me; but perhaps you *don't* quite know

how thoroughly he can afford to do so. The proof of it is, that I can venture to be quite frank with you to-day. I have admired you from the first moment we met, more than any woman I have yet seen. But I never had a hope of winning you; and, if Philip had never sought you, I should never have asked you to share my uncertain fortunes. When your engagement was announced, there was a change in me, I own; and perhaps I felt one painful throb, when I heard of it. But, I swear, there never was in my heart one spark of bitterness or jealousy of Philip—much less a desire to steal away one particle of your love from him. From the very first I wished you both well, just as honestly as I shall do next Tuesday at the altar. I have not quite shaken off the old fascination yet, though I've tried hard enough, God knows; but, for months past, I would no more have connected you with a guilty or covetous thought, than I would have trampled on my dead sister's grave. Those rash words of mine were spoken, when we were both too near the next world to stand on form or ceremony; and I *did*

forget duty in my great fear for you. There is only one reason why I hope Philip will never guess what I have been telling you now. He is so good and kind, that he would be always reproaching himself with having stood between me and the light. It is not so. I believe a year or so of foreign service will work a thorough cure. There is happiness in the after-time for me, as well as for you. This is the longest speech I ever made. I know you cannot be offended; but—so many thanks for listening patiently."

Georgie's face was shaded by her hand, while Maurice was speaking; when she raised it, it was wet with tears—tears, springing not from bitterness or shame, but from pity, and sympathy, and gratitude—tears, such as a husband might see on his fair wife's cheek, and never doubt her loyalty. Though she honoured Dering, at that moment, more than any other living, not a spark of guilty passion lurked beneath: her feeling somewhat resembled the simple hero-worship, that many women have nourished for famous men whom they have never seen.

"Neither Philip nor I can ever pay half our debts to you," she said at last, almost in a whisper; and held out a little tremulous hand.

Maurice held it for a second lightly, as he raised it to his lips, with the same gesture of rather old-fashioned courtesy that you may remember on a certain afternoon in the past. Then he spoke, quite cheerfully, with the old merry light in his eyes.

"I've given up all hopes of making either of you reasonable on that point. Well, if you persist in giving me great credit for doing—as any other man alive would have done—my best, you shall pay me off by instalments. When Philip writes, as he will do every month, you can look over his shoulder, and put in a tiny postscript with any scrap of news you think I should care to hear. And will you pet The Moor now and then; a good deal for me, and a little for yourself? He stands at Marston while I'm away: I'll never part with him; but he wouldn't do for India."

"You know how glad I shall be to do all this—and more."

While the words were on Georgie's lips, the door opened, and Lady Verschoyle entered. She had actually roused herself sufficiently to descend, and confer for a few minutes with Dering, as Gascoigne's plenipotentiary, anent certain arrangements for the Tuesday following.

So the subject that these two had been discoursing on, was sealed up between them, thenceforward for ever.

It was months since Maurice had felt so thoroughly light of heart, as when he rode homeward that afternoon. Indeed, though he had hardly realised it at the time, he had achieved a rare and exceptional triumph. He had actually made a woman his friend for life, by—telling her the simple truth.

There is no reason why we should linger over the details of the double wedding. The Dean of Torrcaster—duly 'assisted' of course—performed the ceremony with a stern austerity of demeanour that made it sound very like a funeral service; indeed, one of the subalterns, a slim spectacled curate, was so awed and impressed thereby, that he made two verbal errors in the

small part he had to perform, thereby drawing upon himself a sharp reprimand in the disrobing chamber afterwards.

Dering played the bridesman gallantly. For one moment, just at the plighting of the troth, a vague misty feeling overcame him; so that his own father's words, spoken within a foot of his ear, sounded as though some stranger were uttering them from a long distance off; but his wandering glance met Paul Chetwynde's eyes, fixed on him keenly and anxiously. They had precisely the same effect on Maurice as the sight of cold water often produces on a lady preparing to faint; he recovered instantly, and had no relapses. Indeed he was rather brilliant than otherwise at the breakfast, and conducted himself to the entire satisfaction of the bridesmaid he had specially in charge. If the truth must be told, a phantasm, with chestnut hair and brown eyes, and an erect martial bearing, for weeks after mingled not unfrequently with that damsel's virginal dreams.

Miss Verschoyle looked distractingly pretty, and changed her name with not a whit more

nervousness, than was decorous and becoming. Even the Dean of Torrcaster softened into a cast-steel smile of approbation when he congratulated her in the vestry: if he had been *very* much pressed, it is possible the holy man would have bestowed on that fair brow a single paternal salute.

And Ida Carew?

Surely the most callous spectator there would have shrunk and shuddered, if he could have guessed at the tumult of conflicting passions, rioting and raging in that wicked, wayward heart. Of the inward strife, the placid, handsome face betrayed not the shadow of a sign. She was always so pale that no change was perceptible here; yet, throughout the early morning, a weary sleepless look haunted her face; and, if her maid had told tales, perchance something might have been heard of 'red lavender,' or some other among those mysterious feminine stimulants, of which the vulgar male world is but little aware. She brightened up as the day went on, and had never looked more perfectly lovely than when she stood by the altar.

But, mark. At the very moment when she uttered the vow—'to honour and obey,'—those wonderful, deep eyes were lifted under the bridal veil, and shot one straight, swift glance to the spot where, in the background of the group, stood—Maurice Dering.

* * * * *

One scene more before we part with one of our characters for awhile.

Stand here with me, on the crest of the hill, and watch the finish for the Grand Military of 185—. A brace of minutes now will settle, who shall win and wear the Soldiers' Blue Riband.

The three leading horses—nothing else has the ghost of a chance—have just swept round the last turning flag into the straight run-in; only three fences and a flight of bushed hurdles are between them and the judge's chair. Only three fences: but they are laid tough and strong with the famous Gorsehamptonshire thorn that holds hind legs like wire.

Ajax is in front—a great raking chesnut, with a coarse head and ragged hips, but a rare

jumper and galloper when the ground is not too deep. He pulled like a steam-engine for the first two miles, but it is as much as he can do now to get over the ridge-and-furrow without rolling in his stride. Ajax's rider is Captain Burstall of the Royals, one of the hardest—if not one of the best—men to hounds in broad England. His friends and admirers assert that his nerve is so extraordinary, that he has sometimes to steady, or, as it were, handicap himself, with a portentous cigar before starting for cover: otherwise, "he would be a little above himself, and jumping everything." He walks under eleven stone, but is built like a bull and very nearly as strong; those brawny bow-legs grip the saddle like a vice.

About three lengths behind, is Mildmay of the Coldstreams, riding his own mare, Lady Agatha, and riding her right well. There is great craft and coolness behind the pale beardless face; indeed, that boy is very few pounds worse than the average of professionals even now, though not more than four years have fled since he ceased to be 'a pretty page.' The mare well

deserves to carry the hopes and money of the Household Brigade; you might guide her with a silken thread, and she was never known to fall; see, how the ridge-and-furrow seems to melt away under her swift smooth stride.

Last of the three—he has been waiting in front from the start—comes our old friend The Moor, steered, also, by his owner.

The scattered murmurs and shouts at the Stand are deepening into a concentrated roar; not only comrades and partisans are shouting, but the Ring too waxes stentorian: it is strongly represented to-day, for it so chances that no other meeting clashes with the Soldiers' Race. The 'talent' don't much fancy Ajax; of the other two the mare has a trifle the call in the betting; but the prevailing cry is—"No one names the winner."

Some one *does* name the winner, though; and names him pretty often. The undaunted backer is no other than Gerald Annesleigh. He stands a cracker on The Moor, and has laid against everything else. Yet he still keeps piling on the money, in spite of the imploring

looks and whispers of Penrhyn Bligh, who stands close by his patron's side, looking more white and nervous than ever, with the twitch about his mouth quickened painfully.

Ah!—it lies between the pair of them, now. Ajax's rider rather lost his head when he saw the winning flag straight before him, and was a little hard on his horse over the thirty-acre ridge-and-furrow. The second fence from home is a 'laid' one—black and firm as masonry. Ajax drags his hind legs, ever so little; the next instant there is a crash, that we can almost *hear*, and a confused heap struggles in the ditch yawning on the landing side.

The man is up first. Not hurt? What a question! Why, you might blow Dick Burstall from a gun, and he would rise up on his feet, with only a few immaterial contusions. Nevertheless, the chief of the 'Cut-'em-down Captains' must wait for his Blue Riband till the next year.

It is the nearest thing between the other two. Twice Dering goes up to Lady Agatha's girths, and twice she slips away in front again, with, apparently, fatal facility. Louder

and wilder go up the cheers of the Household Brigade, who are shouting as if the race was over; and still through the uproar cleave the clear ringing tones of Gerald Annesleigh,

"The Moor! The Moor! for any even money."

Over the hurdles without a mistake. Halfway up the distance Maurice makes his last effort: this time he gets to the mare's head, and *keeps there*. For a second or so, the two run locked and level, as if they were yoked in harness; then the lean brown head begins to steal in front, just as it did in Harlestone Chase. Lady Agatha runs game as a pebble to the last; but The Moor runs the longest.

All over now. The Gilt Vase is fairly won; and the Guards shall only score a *proximè accessit* of the honours of this year.

Annesleigh's hand, that has been suspended over Penrhyn Bligh's shoulder for the last few seconds, descends with a force that brings the meek little man to his knee; but he looks up in Gerald's flushed face with intense admiration,

as the latter mutters in a voice rather hoarser than usual, with one of his own double-shotted oaths,—

"Landed, by ——."

The victor's ovation among his comrades was only half over, when a man in his own regiment came up with Annesleigh, who wished for an introduction. Gerald's manner, when he was on his good behaviour; was singularly graceful and winning. Maurice was not insensible of its attraction, though common fame had prejudiced him strongly against the speaker; besides, he was in a humour to be pleased with anything, just then. So he accepted the other's congratulations, and disclaimed his compliments with frank courtesy.

"I'm very glad you trusted the old horse with your money," he said. "I knew we should be close up at the finish, if we were not quite out-paced. Indeed, I ought only to have been afraid of one in the race. Lady Agatha has a great turn of speed, and Mildmay rides like a professional. I don't really deserve much credit; one had only to sit steady, as it turned

out. He's a very easy horse to ride. Would you like to look him over?"

"Very much," Gerald assented. "I hardly had time to glance at him when he was saddled, I was so busy up here. It was a real good thing all through; and a rare turn of luck for me. Say what you like, I have seldom seen a race better ridden, and I watch a certain number in the course of the year. Remember, if I ever have a chance of doing you a good turn, I owe you one."

If you have patience to read to the end, you will see how that debt was paid.

When—after a night of heavy play, during which the luck has been running dead against him, with never a turn in the tide—the crippled gamester walks slowly home through the brightening twilight, and, reckoning up his available resources, finds that he may not hope to renew the fight against Fortune for many a day to come, there mingles often, they say, with the bitterness of discomfiture, a strange sense of relief and refreshment—arising from the certainty that, now, nothing more can be hoped,

or feared, or struggled for; that weary brain and strained nerves must perforce find rest for awhile.

Some such feeling as this shot through Maurice Dering's breast, as, a month later, he watched a cold January sun go down behind the Dorset highlands: he stood, then, on the deck of the good ship Indus, outward-bound.

CHAPTER XII.

BENEDICTINE DAYS.

Two years went by, bringing little of change to those who abode still in England; yet they brought an heir to the broad lands of Marston Lisle. It was a very small baby, with Georgie's bright, soft hair, and Philip's dark, dreamy eyes, rather fragile and delicate to look upon; but it must have had a remarkably good constitution, or it could not have supported the incredible amount of petting lavished upon it by all the female members of the family, with Aunt Nellie, of course, at their head. That infant's apparel was a perfect miracle of florid decoration; yet its admirers ceased not to tax their ingenuity in the production of new intricacies of needlework, to be offered to their tiny sovereign.

Maternity did not make Georgie look a whit more matronly, nor sober her in any way, ma-

terially. She was very fond and proud of her baby, and it was the prettiest sight imaginable to see them together; but she was not disposed to sacrifice her time and her fancies to nursery despotism. The spirit of coquetry was still alive and strong within her; she would flirt, at times, quite as scientifically, if not quite so openly, as in the old days; but scandal had never yet been busy with her name, and the world only did her justice here; for, of anything beyond the indulgence of vanity, she was absolutely innocent.

Philip was thoroughly and completely happy. So far from feeling jealous or sulky about these little *escapades* of his fair wife, they rather amused and gratified him: he looked upon each conquest of hers as a fresh. social triumph—simply a homage due to her wonderful fascinations. Indeed, before she slept, Georgie used to repeat to him some of the prettiest speeches that had been murmured in her ear during the evening; and certain Lotharios, in intention, would have been sorely discomfited if they could have heard the trills of silvery laughter that often interrupted the narration.

Mrs. Gascoigne achieved an immense success in the country. Marston had always been a pleasant house; but its attractions seemed increased, now, sevenfold. Even Paul Chetwynde, in despite of the prejudices of which you have heard, could not deny that this was entirely due to the delicate Butterfly-Queen. She was an especial favourite with the womankind, from the curate's wife in her own parish up to the Duchess of Devorgoil. That ample and august lady—of whom Georgie pretended to be so terribly afraid—though she would shake her head at times, and talk about "thoughtlessness and want of dignity," would scarcely have had the heart to clip the wings of the pretty 'light-minded bird,' or to tame her into frigid propriety.

The aspect of things in the West was not quite so brilliant. The curse of childlessness, which for many generations had haunted the direct line of the Luttrells, seemed still to prevail at Minstercombe. Neither was Ida's popularity in the neighbourhood at all comparable to her fascinating cousin's. To those honest Devonians she

appeared intensely proud and reserved: she was, in reality, only listless and indifferent, and careless about dissembling, when she chanced to be unusually bored. Only once, the natural haughtiness of her nature spoke out.

There lived, not far from Minstercombe, an elderly dowager of great influence and repute; the widow of a deceased county magnate. She was a kind, good woman at heart; profuse in her charity, and much given to hospitality of a formal, constrained sort: but she loved to patronise both high and low, and chose to be Lady Paramount as well as Lady Bountiful. She was very ready on all occasions with her dictatorial advice; but especially bestowed it on all young married females who came to live within the limits of her rule. To such, on the earliest feasible opportunity, she would deliver a set form of lecture on Conjugal Duty—verbose, grandiloquent, Chaponic; and hitherto all her victims had submitted unresistingly, if not respectfully.

When Mrs. Standishe paid her first state visit to Minstercombe, she prepared to play the Monitress, as usual: she never repeated the

experiment. Ida said very little, and that little very quietly; but she contrived to quell the ancient lady after a fashion that the latter never forgot or forgave. She was firm in her friendships, and never unjust even when most deeply offended; so she did not altogether withdraw her countenance from the house, whose master she had known from boyhood. But, ever afterwards, she used to sigh, with ominous significance, as she mentioned "*poor* Mr. Luttrell's" name, and would throw out dark hints of danger impending over that ill-governed household.

Yet Geoffrey did not deserve much pity, as yet. It is true that his careless joviality was somewhat abated, and sometimes he would look quite grave and thoughtful; but he was not unhappy, or even discontented; and if there were a real change, he himself could not have analyzed or explained it.

Ida's manner towards him was the same as it had always been; perfectly pleasant and good-natured, but nothing more. She was irreproachable in all points of wifely duty, and was never irritable, or imperious, or exacting. Yet if

Geoffrey had questioned his own heart, he would have felt a longing there to meet with some flaw in the calm perfection; some whim, that he might gratify—were it ever so unreasonable; some outbreak of temper that he might pacify—were it ever so groundless.

There was no room for distrust in his honest nature; but the vague disappointment, that he used to shake off so readily, began to grow more defined in its gloomy outlines. He never dreamt of murmuring or repining; yet he could not always help feeling that he was casting away all the treasures of his faith and love, to be repaid by a scanty mite of cool, amicable regard.

His childlessness, too, weighed heavily, at times, on Geoffrey's mind. It was not only that he longed for an heir to his possessions and ancient name: he had a faint idea—scarcely mounting to a hope—that if that one link existed between them, it must needs draw his wife closer to the heart that was so eager to take her in. Was he right, there? I know not. In drama, or romance, the crucial test of maternity never fails. But in real life——

Ah, me! it is better to let the question pass by.

Certainly, their happiest days were those spent away from Minstercombe. It is a sign ominous to a household's peace, when the spirits of one or both of its rulers rise in exact proportion to the distance lying between them and home. This was certainly so with Ida; and, perhaps, with Geoffrey—in a less degree. Things went best with them, during their long visits to Marston Lisle.

Now, you know something of Ida's feelings towards her charming cousin. It is scarcely probable that there was much change here: her loves and hatreds were singularly consistent and abiding. But dissimulation to such an accomplished actress was the easiest of all tasks, now that that there was no tangible provocation to be encountered daily.

Since that grey January day, when the Indus left her moorings in Southampton Water, Georgie might make as many conquests as she pleased: —Ida would grudge her never one.

So she bore her part right pleasantly in the

gaieties of Marston, and was a very efficient *aide* to the fair mistress of the revels. It was there, too, she oftenest met Paul Chetwynde; for the latter was too lazy to travel into the far West when he had a chance of lighting on his friends nearer home. The Luttrells were never long in London; for Geoffrey detested pavement intensely, and Ida was never unnecessarily cruel.

Dering was creditably regular in his correspondence; but it was rather unequally divided; the larger share fell to Gascoigne and far the smallest to Luttrell. This did not disquiet or chafe the honest parson in the least.

"I'm not good at scribbling, like you two," he was wont to say, with his great hearty laugh. "I don't know why the old boy should write to me at all, as I see all his letters, if it were not that he guesses I like to hear, at first hand, of his doings among the big game. How I *do* envy him. And think of you fellows trying to stop him from going out," &c., &c.

Before Dering had been a full year in India he had achieved no small renown as a *shikari*, and had despatched to Marston the skin of a

full-grown tiger, slain by him on foot, fairly face to face.

Gascoigne used to contemplate that trophy, as it lay before the hearth in his own room, with inexpressible pride and triumph. He was never weary of telling the story of the slaughter, mingling therein certain professional phrases of Eastern venerie which he had contrived to master. Each new guest at Marston—there were many who had never seen a loaded rifle, and cared nothing for sport of any description—was doomed to listen to that tale: for the first time in his life Philip seemed not to calculate on the possibility of his hearer being bored. Indeed, as Chetwynde once remarked, "He couldn't have been more insufferably vainglorious than if he had shot the brute himself."

When only the family circle (in which Paul, of course, reckoned himself) was staying at Marston, they often used to gather round that hearth, as the autumn evenings were closing in, and talk of the strong hunter far away.

From childhood upwards, Ida Luttrell's notions of comfort had been rather *feline;* she had a

peculiar facility of curling herself up into corners, and never sate formally erect if she could possibly help it. On these occasions she used to nestle down on the tiger-skin, close to the savage head and white grinning fangs, with her head pillowed on Georgie's knee; her hand rested naturally on the ragged spot, where the heavy bullet had rent its way in to the life.

So she would lie, still and silent, her breathing low and regular as in sleep, while the others talked on. But, ever and anon, if you could have peered under the veil of lashes into those downcast eyes, you would have seen a flickering light there, that never came from the reflection of the fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

A SAFE INVESTMENT.

On a certain May morning, soon after breakfast, Chetwynde was sitting alone in his chambers, when his servant brought in a card, whereon was written, in a stiff, clerkly hand, "Mr. Thos. Brine."

Paul had an exceptionally retentive memory for faces and names; but now he was rather puzzled, and had to ruminate some seconds before he could identify his visitor.

"Brine—Brine?" he said. "Why, surely that's the name of Serocold's managing clerk. What on earth can he want with me so early; and why don't he write instead of sending? Let him come up, Evans. I confess to feeling rather curious: it will turn out to be nothing, of course."

For once Paul Chetwynde was *not* doomed to be disappointed.

There entered a short stout man, somewhat beyond middle-age, very decorously attired in black broadcloth; the self-satisfied expression of his smug, smooth face, rather neutralised the effect of a studiously obsequious manner.

"Won't you take a chair, Mr. Brine?" Paul said. "You come on business, I presume, from Mr. Serocold."

"Thank you, sir," the other answered, as he seated himself. "I *do* come on business—on your business too. But not from Mr. Serocold. I left his office quite a month ago; at my own wish, I beg to assure you. Since that time I have been with Messrs. ——" He named a firm rather eminent among the sharp practitioners of the day.

"I'm very glad to hear of that," Paul replied, arching his eyebrows slightly. "But would you be good enough to come, at once, to what interests me personally? I've one or two engagements this morning."

He spoke more coldly and distantly than was

his wont; but, in truth, he was by no means favourably impressed by the demeanour of his visitor.

Mr. Bring did not seem to notice this; but went on in the same smooth, unctuous tone.

"Let me state, sir, in the first place, that I have no mercenary motives in coming here to-day. I don't expect to be rewarded, except by my own conscience. But duty compels one to do disagreeable things at times. I'll come to the point immediately. But will you allow me to ask you one question, in confidence,—What is your opinion of Mr. Serocold?"

"I decline answering that question," Paul answered, more haughtily than before. "I'm not in the habit of exchanging confidences with utter strangers, nor of favouring them with my opinion about third parties—professional or otherwise."

The smug face opposite waxed somewhat sulky and lowering; but there was no change in the trained humility of the other's voice and manner.

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir. I had no

intention of offending you. Would you mind answering *this*, then? Did you entrust 5000*l.* to Mr. Serocold some three years ago; and do you know how that money is invested now? I assure you I have reasons for asking; I can have no object in being impertinently inquisitive."

"There's something in that," Paul muttered; and then went on aloud: "I certainly did entrust that sum to Mr. Serocold about the time you allude to. I believe it's invested in Canada Bonds. I could tell, of course, by referring to my papers. But Mr. Serocold holds a general power of attorney from me. All I know is, that I have received the interest quite regularly, and that satisfies me."

"You are not hard to satisfy, sir," Brine replied, with just the dawn of a sneer hovering round his mouth. "But I dare say the interest would be paid regularly for some time to come. As to the principal——"

That marble head of Paul Chetwynde's was as cool about his own financial affairs as about all other earthly things; but it must be owned that

he felt rather more than curious just at this moment.

"What the d—l's the use of beating about the bush?" he said, with unusual hastiness. "Can't you say in a dozen words what is wrong, if you know of anything?"

He had not long to wait for the answer; and it was concise and explicit enough to satisfy any one.

"Every shilling was sold out a year ago."

There came a sparkle of malicious triumph into the speaker's dull grey eyes, as he saw Chetwynde change colour, and drive the nails of his right hand into the leather of the arm-chair in which he was lounging.

But it was only for a second or two that his wonderful self-command failed. He did not speak till he had had time to reflect that, though the loss was a heavy one, it was by no means ruinous; he had still an income left amply sufficient for his wants, and for indulgence in most luxuries. After the first shock of vexation and surprise had passed, Paul began to realise the satisfaction that would accrue to

one of his peculiar temperament, from having the austere sectarian so thoroughly on the hip. So he answered with perfect composure, though his brows were still bent heavily.

"If I understand you aright, you accuse Mr. Serocold of felony. Dangerous words, if they can't be substantiated. And you have known of this, since it was done. Isn't there some such such thing as 'misprision?'"

The other looked up into his face cunningly, but without flinching.

"I don't accuse Mr. Serocold of anything of the sort. Perhaps he has taken care to keep clear of felony. As for myself—we don't criminate ourselves in the school where I was bred. There are no witnesses to what is said here, remember, even if it is not to be considered confidential. But, Mr. Chetwynde, if you'll be good enough to consider, I'm sure you will see you are taking this matter in a wrong light. I can have no possible motive except to serve you."

Paul's keen, cold eyes shot at the informer one single glance, straight and swift as a sword thrust.

"Or to injure Serocold?" he said. "How about that? I should like to know on what terms you parted."

You will hardly find any scoundrel so case-hardened, as not to feel annoyance at being forced abruptly to descend from the position he has assumed, be that position ever so low already.

Mr. Brine was hugely disconcerted; and perforce took refuge in sullenness.

"I don't see what that has to do with this business, or how it concerns anybody except myself. I've said before, I left at my own desire. I've got my bread to make, and a character to lose, too, or I shouldn't be where I am. Suppose I didn't choose to risk both by staying in an office where such things were going on—where there might be a crash any day? Then, every one would have said—'Like master, like man.' Now, I'm clear, and I mean to keep so. I warn you, Mr. Chetwynde, if it comes into Court, it's no use calling me as a witness. I shall know nothing. You can easily prove if I've spoken the truth, by asking Sero-

cold for your bonds. But if you'll take my advice, you'll make no criminal matter of it. You might get back most of the money, perhaps, if you managed well."

"I shall take other advice before I decide on that," Paul said. "I don't like compromises in such matters. Besides, the chances of recovery must be small. Serocold was getting desperate when he ran such a venture as this."

The other shook his head mysteriously.

"You're right enough there, sir," he said. "Serocold was insolvent twice over months ago. But he has powerful friends of his own persuasion, who would pay something to save scandal. Besides, I think he holds a secret or two, worth money."

Chetwynde pondered awhile in silence. Suddenly a new thought seemed to strike him; and his face became more dark and troubled than it had been since the interview began.

"What an idiot, not to have thought of that before! Why, half Philip's title-deeds may have been lying in that accursed office. And it was I who recommended Serocold!"

There was a shade of professional contempt in Mr. Brine's smile; but it was comfortably reassuring.

"Don't alarm yourself, sir," he said, promptly. "I can answer for all such being safe. Real property is not so easily convertible as bonds, and stock, and personal securities. You and a few more will be the only sufferers; and I fancy you will be the heaviest."

The man spoke after his light; and, probably, meant what he said at the time: it was a simple question of pounds, shillings, and pence with him.

When, months afterwards, Paul Chetwynde became aware of all the cruel truth, he felt ashamed at having wasted so much pity on himself.

What was his loss compared to that of the scarred grey-haired man who had trusted the proceeds of his commission to Serocold for investment? He had won his way upwards from the ranks by hard, good service—(and hard pinching too, for he purchased one step)—till he got his company,—only to find himself, at fifty-eight, nearly as penniless as when he enlisted,

with the addition of a stiff shoulder, an ailing wife, and two helpless children.

How did the news fall on the weak, nervous devotee, who had given all her dead husband's savings, and the fortune of her own child, into the hands of the austere pietist, with no more doubt or suspicion than if she had laid the money on God's altar? To *her* there was much mercy dealt; for the blow killed her very soon.

But it fared not so well with the orphan. She had a cruelly hard time of it in her first situation. The head of the family was a chief of the Cottonocracy, who paid thrice as much for the tending of his hot-house plants as for the training of his olive branches; he stood in extreme terror of his butler, whom he had bribed away from a dukery, and when he had endured more than wonted contumely at the hands of that awful dignitary, was wont to descend on the school-room, and relieve his feelings by bullying the governess. Perhaps, a loathing of that intolerable servitude, and a desire to win liberty at any price, spoke as strongly as the voice of the tempter who lured

the girl to sin, and left her to shame. Years afterwards, you might have heard a miserable unsexed woman—possessed, as it seemed, by seven devils at the least—when the fury of drink-frenzy was abating, and the maudlin stage was coming on, wailing out broken memories of how "she had been a lady once, and might have kept so still, if her poor mother had not trusted all their money to a ——"

If Robert Serocold could have heard the awful maledictions that closed the sentence, I think he would have shivered on his prison-pallet, though the model cell was warmed to a turn.

To return to our sheep, one of whom so lately found himself shorn.

Paul Chetwynde was so intensely relieved by what he now heard, that his humour became almost genial. He began to think that he had dealt to his visitor rather scantier measure of courtesy than may justly be allotted to the bearer of evil tidings.

"I'm sincerely glad you can say so much," he said. "For a moment—you see I know less than nothing about those things—I feared I

had got Mr. Gascoigne into a worse scrape than my own. I've taken your information rather ungraciously: it was well meant, I dare say; at any rate, I've no business to go into your motives. Pray remember, if you should repent hereafter of having told me all this gratuitously, I shall be ready to reward you according to my power—whether I save anything out of the wreck or not."

The other shook his head negatively; but he appeared rather gratified by the half apology. So they parted, with few more words.

It may be well to say here, that Mr. Brine never did return to claim any recompense. During the years that he had served Robert Serocold, dislike and fear had ripened into a steady enmity; though the worm turned late, it turned viciously at last. The man would risk nothing; and waited till he could expose his oppressor without compromising himself, or damaging his own professional prospects; but when he became comparatively independent, he did not dally long with the luxury of uncommercial revenge.

As soon as his visitor had withdrawn, and he had collected certain necessary memoranda, Chetwynde betook himself to the Temple, where dwelt a friend more learned than himself in the law. After a brief consultation, they sent for an eminent detective, whose office was hard by, and took counsel of the oracle. Eventually it was settled that Paul was to see Serocold, in the first instance, alone. But in the square outside was posted one of the most trustworthy of the subalterns; a staunch sleuth-hound, who, ere this, had kept the trail from one end of Europe to the other, till the quarry turned to bay at last, in very weariness and despair.

A sour-looking clerk took in Paul's name to his principal, and returned with a message to the effect that "if Mr. Chetwynde's business was not very important, perhaps he could make it convenient to call later in the day."

"Mr. Chetwynde's business *was* important; and he could *not* make it convenient to call at any other hour." So he was admitted into the Serocoldian sanctum without further delay.

There sate the good man, with lips more

compressed and a gloomier brow than usual; as if he had grave cause to complain of having been disturbed in more important business. Indeed, there was a judicial austerity in his whole demeanour, inexpressibly exasperating to one who knew as much as did his present visitor and late client.

"Will you be seated, Mr. Chetwynde?" he said. "I trust you will be as brief as possible. I am deeply engaged this morning."

Paul sank into the chair thus indicated, simply from his inveterate habit of taking everything at ease, if not easily; if he had been condemned to be shot to death, he would certainly have preferred to face the platoon—sitting. But there was a set expression about his mouth, and an odd look in his eyes—half cruel, half scornful—that the other could not long have failed to observe.

"You will have to defer your business, whatever it is; and it depends on yourself whether this interview is to be brief or not. Possibly, the matter may be very easily settled. I want to sell out that £5000 of Canada Bonds;—at

once, mind. I have a better investment for the money."

If you had seen Robert Serocold's everyday complexion, you would have thought it scarcely possibly that its pallor could deepen: yet there was a perceptible change now: near the cheek-bones and the angle of the jaw the dull white seemed marbled with a faint livid green. A very close observer might have noticed a slight shaking of the thin, callous hands, that shuffled some papers together, rather hurriedly; but there was no tremor in the hard grating voice.

"If you were more of a business-man, Mr. Chetwynde, you would know that it is impossible to change your securities at a moment's notice. You say, you have found a better investment. I would advise you not to be rash. You will scarcely find any such that can be called safe, and will return you higher interest."

"I'm very happy to say I'm *not* a business-man, as you interpret the word," Paul retorted, without attempting to disguise a sneer. "But, with all my ignorance, I happen to know that

Canada Bonds are nearly as negotiable as bank-notes. As to the safety of investments—that's a matter of opinion. If you will hand me the bonds, you need trouble yourself no farther in the matter. I will take the consequences on myself, and my broker can manage the rest of the business."

His keen glance rested full on the other while he spoke; but Serocold met it with wonderful steadiness.

"You are the best judge of your own interests, of course. If you will call here at noon to-morrow, I will hand you over your bonds."

"I prefer to-day," Chetwynde answered. "There is ample time. Will you be good enough to inform me where they are deposited?"

Then—in spite of all his audacity and craft—the lawyer felt that the evil moment was upon him. There came into his eyes a glassy, haggard look, fearful to see; it was more from habit than deliberate intent that he fenced yet a few seconds longer.

"Where are they deposited?" he said, hoarsely. "At—my banker's, of course."

Paul leant forward, with his arm resting on the table between them, till his face was only a foot or so from the other's. He spoke just as coolly and slowly as if he had been making the most ordinary remark.

"At your banker's? The proceeds of the sale, I suppose you mean. Haven't you got rid of all yet? For the bonds were sold a year ago."

Paul had promised himself a little intellectual amusement in that interview. He had reckoned on some sport with the stratagems and evasions of Tartuffe so near his unmasking. But his patience—great as it was—yielded to the strain. He delivered that home-thrust at least five minutes too soon.

For some seconds after, the two faces remained opposite to each other, without recoiling an inch or moving a muscle—the one set in a pitiless scorn, too deep for anger—the other possessed by a blank, ghastly horror. Then the lawyer locked his fingers tightly over his stony eyes; and his head fell forward on the table,

with a dull crash, such as you hear when you strike horn upon wood.

Chetwynde sauntered slowly to the window, and looked out into the square. There leant, against a lamp-post a few yards off, the invaluable detective, poisoning the fresh May air with the blackest of graveolent cigars, and conversing with an infirm and palpably imbecile ticket-porter, with a broad, benevolent smile on his florid countenance. A hoarse, guttural sound behind him made Paul turn round. The lawyer had lifted his head, and was trying to speak. At last the words came out of his dry throat huskily.

"You know all, it seems. I guess where you learnt it. I deny nothing. What do you mean to do?"

He never wasted time in asking for mercy or forbearance: there was scant trace of either in the calm, implacable face that confronted him now.

"I mean to get my money back, if I can," Paul said, sternly. "If not—perhaps, even, if I do—I make no terms—I'll have money's worth

to the utmost farthing, if I can get it out of criminal law. If I didn't prosecute, it would only be on the conditions that you wound up affairs, and left the country immediately. And all we, whom you have robbed, must share and share alike. You don't suppose I'm going to save myself at the expense of the rest, whosoever they may be. I should simply be an accomplice in the swindle. Without more paltering—what do you propose?"

Once more the lawyer shaded his face with his hand; when he uncovered it, it wore a cunning expression, as if he saw a gleam of safety in the black horizon.

"I will not palter with you, Mr. Chetwynde," he said; "I prefer telling you at once, frankly (you should have seen Paul's look when that word came out) that, from my own resources, I can make no restitution to you or to anyone. But, if time is given, I have friends—substantial friends—who might make some sacrifices sooner than see scandal cast on the good cause, through the shame of an unworthy professor."

"Friends!" the other retorted, with intense

disdain; "a proper recommendation—that they should be friends of yours! They must bring a better testimonial than that, and better security than a sanctimonious outside, and better argument than texts quoted glibly, if they wish me to treat with them. As to time—I'll give you till noon to-morrow; not an hour longer. As I said before, I will listen, but I promise nothing."

The crafty look on Serocold's face darkened into malevolence again.

"You do not know of whom you are speaking," he said, darkly. "Cannot holy men hold the same faith with sinners? Is Scripture untrue because the Devil quotes it sometimes? There is one text you might remember—'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' Mr. Chetwynde, the time you fix is too short. For your own sake, you had better have more patience."

"I don't intend to bandy words with you, much less discuss points of doctrine," the other broke in. "I will not extend the delay by ten minutes. I would never have granted it, but for the chance that others, besides myself, may

the man's nature re-asserted itself. There he sat—with the garment of righteousness that had masqued him these many years torn in shreds from his shoulders—dishonoured exile in his future, even if he escaped a prison; knowing well that in all the world there was no door that would henceforth be open to him without a golden key; knowing, too, the full extent of the ruin he had brought, not only on Chetwynde, whom he hated for his scoffs and gibes, but on others who had listened in timid reverence to his lectures and cowered before his admonitions, trusting him all the while as if he had been some stern angel: he sat, I say, contemplating this Past and this Future, and yet maintained the old, hard, austere demeanour. It seemed as though he must have swallowed some antidote to the poisons of remorse and shame.

"I don't suppose you *will* confess more," Paul said, after a pause; "and I don't know what good it would do, at present, if you did. But, I own, I should like to know, what on earth became of all the money. I should not have been quite deceived, I think, if I had not given

you credit for being rather miserly in your tastes."

There was something in these words that goaded Serocold out of his sullen torpor; a savage light rushed into his eyes; he shook his clenched hand aloft, as if threatening or defying Heaven, after mocking it so long; and his hoarse strained voice rose almost to a shriek.

"Gone——. Can I say, where? Sunk in every pit-fall that could swallow up money. And —why? Have I not been toiling and scheming while others were sleeping, and pinching myself while others squandered; aye, and praying while others were mocking? Have I ever yielded to the vices or pleasures in which others delight? What have I ever spent on drink, or woman, or play? Why, the very income that you lose now would only have bought you mere luxuries. I was always cautious, and took wise counsel too. Yet nothing would go right: losing—losing, always, till I came to—this. If I had won, I would have made my name famous for good deeds. And we talk of the justice of God!"

Rhapsody was very foreign to the cold formalist's nature; yet, he certainly seemed to speak bitterly in earnest. It is just possible—there are such strange anomalies amongst us—that his fanaticism was only half a lie. If so, he was not the first of his class that has tried to make austere bigotry atone for deliberate dishonesty.

But an expression of supreme disgust swept across Paul Chetwynde's face as he recoiled a full pace from the speaker.

"You are going to try blasphemy now, I suppose," he said, "since cant has failed. You had better keep that tirade for the dock, where you are sure to stand sooner or later, whether *I* send you there or no. The devil take your insolence! You rob me, and I don't know how many more, and then boast that you 'are not as we are;' finishing up by denying Heaven's justice because your speculations have failed. By oath, you're a natural curiosity. But I'll not trust myself much longer in your society, for all that. By noon to-morrow, or—you know the consequences."

So Chetwynde left the lawyer to his meditations, or devotions, without another word.

The amiable detective, who had just lighted another cigar, and engaged the ancient ticket-porter in another interminable story, took no notice of his principal as he passed: the slightest nod from Paul told him that he was to remain on guard. He was soon after joined by a comrade, if possible more florid and affable than himself. Robert Serocold was virtually just as much a prisoner now as if the manacles were on his wrists.

He knew that: he knew that if he were to dodge all over London all that night, a stealthy step would always be close behind his own, and one pair of sharp eyes, at the least, close to his shoulder. Far better to go straight home, and let them follow him, and watch every outlet from his house through which a dog could have crept.

Directly he was left alone, Mr. Serocold began to write a letter, with slow, painful deliberation: he dispatched this by a messenger as soon as it was finished. After this he never dipped pen

in ink again; making no attempt to arrange his affairs, nor even collecting the papers that lay scattered about the table and the room. There he sate quite motionless, with fixed, staring eyes, and a vacant expression on his face, till long after office-hours. He was often in the habit of overstaying the clerks; so they departed, now, unsuspiciously as usual.

At last he went out: there was no particular sign of perturbation about him; only his hat, instead of being set primly and squarely on his head, was crushed down low over his brows. As he passed the lamp-post, where the two detectives were still lounging, one of them, who knew him, saluted him civilly—"hoping he was well."

The lawyer made no answer in words; but there shot from under his shaggy eye-lashes one look of deadly malevolence, and he muttered under his breath one curse, as bitterly blasphemous as ever was mouthed in Alsatia.

The glance and the growl only provoked a smile —of amusement, if not of positive satisfaction— from the persons at whom they were levelled.

It is needless to say that the earth-stoppers never lost sight of their fox till he went fairly to ground. Then they made themselves as comfortable as they could, consistently with unremitting vigilance; and waited patiently for a fresh signal, before beginning business in earnest.

CHAPTER XIV.

HONOUR THY FATHER.

CHETWYNDE, as you know already, took things much more coolly than the average of his fellows. Nevertheless, it must be owned that the annoyances of the day seriously interfered with his appetite. As he was dressing, between seven and eight that evening, after the listless fashion of a man quite indifferent to the dinner in prospect, he was surprised by the announcement that the Dean of Torrcaster was in the drawing-room waiting to see him.

During the few minutes that elapse before Paul can appear before his sire, it may be worth while to sketch the exterior of the eminent divine.

A tall stout man; somewhat over the half-century, but with scarcely a tinge of grey in his strong wiry black hair and bushy eyebrows;

more than upright in his bearing, for, sitting or standing, he carries his head always thrown backward; his complexion decidedly sanguine, yet not healthily ruddy; it looks as though the blood was forced at times too violently through the swollen veins; the features are not badly cast in a large mould,—but altogether it is a very unpleasant face to look upon. The coarse cruel mouth tells tales at once: that face might be sanctimonious, but never sleek or smooth. After one glance at the man, you felt instinctively that the slightest scratch in the thin outward varnish would betray a bitter savage temper beneath, not always restrained within the bounds of overbearing harshness.

One fact speaks significantly enough of the relations subsisting between the two: this was the first time the Dean had set foot in his son's chambers. When Chetwynde entered, he found his father scanning the objects around him with evident contempt and disapproval: of a truth the furniture and other appliances of Paul's chambers differed greatly from those to be found in the solemn rooms at the Deanery,

where everything was of the severe ecclesiastical order.

Paul did not take up the implied challenge; but, after a salutation strangely cold on both sides, asked to know the reason of the unexpected visit.

The Dean cleared his throat twice or thrice before he replied.

"I have come upon very unpleasant business," he said at last. "I have received a note from Mr. Serocold, stating the particulars of your interview this afternoon, and begging me to speak to you on the subject. I need not say how the intelligence has shocked and astounded me; yet I have not thought it right to refuse his request."

Paul's smile, it must be confessed, was anything but pleasant or conciliatory.

"You are the best judge, sir, of course," he said, "of what you owe to yourself and your position. But I should think it was about the first time that a common swindler has chosen a dignitary of the Church as his ambassador. Will you be good enough

to tell me what you are empowered to propose."

The Dean's brow lowered more and more while his son was speaking, till it settled into the black frown that had so often appalled a humble dependent, or faithful follower: with neither of these had he now to deal. He knew it, too; but, from habit perhaps, even at that early stage of the discourse, he could not refrain from launching out in reproof.

"You speak with most unchristian bitterness, to say nothing of implied disrespect to me. Robert Serocold is *not* a common swindler. Up to the unhappy moment when, under great pressure of circumstances, he yielded to temptation, he has borne a character perfectly blameless. I am not about to defend his conduct, or even palliate it. But he assures me that he took the money simply as a loan, meaning fully to repay it, after making calculations on which he had a right to rely. If time is granted him I believe he will make all the amends in his power; and I believe grace will be given him to

repent heartily; repent in a way that *you* perhaps can hardly understand."

Paul's smile was very nearly a sneer now.

"If you think proper, sir, to draw comparisons between Serocold and myself—to my disadvantage,—you can do so, of course; but I distinctly decline to listen to them. I am happy to say that I can *not* sympathise with his feelings in any way—repentant or otherwise. About his intentions, I shall keep my own opinion; nor do I see how they much affect the question. Complete restitution—to others as well as myself, for I can't suppose I am the only victim—is the only amends he can make: he must leave England, too, as soon as his affairs have been thoroughly sifted. He shall have no further chance of plunder, this side the Channel. As to time, the whole thing must be settled reliably—so far as it is possible—before noon to-morrow."

The Dean's face flushed to crimson, and the lines round his cruel mouth grew deep and set, as though drawn by a graver's steel. He controlled himself with a mighty effort; but if a child had been standing then between these two,

it would have guessed that the interview could not end in peace.

"You are trifling," he said, hoarsely. "You know full well that you ask for impossibilities. Serocold has no resources of his own, and those of such as would help to avert a public scandal are limited, and cannot be realised at a day's notice. He led me to believe that you would listen to any reasonable composition."

"You will find I am not trifling at all," Paul retorted with exasperating coolness. "And if Serocold told you anything of that sort, he lied, as he has been lying all his life long. I said I would listen, but would promise nothing. I *have* listened; and I am more than ever inclined to accept no terms, but let the law take its course."

The Dean rose from his seat with slow solemnity; the room was only lighted by a single reading-lamp, and his figure loomed impressively large, as he stood somewhat in the shadow. He stretched out his right hand, with his favourite gesture of menace and denunciation —he had copied it, years ago, from a picture of

Jeremiah cursing Jerusalem—which, from the Torrcaster pulpit, had stricken terror into the hearts of true believers as well as evil-doers: poor Mrs. Carew still saw it in her dreams, and would wake a-trembling. The ponderous syllables came one by one, like measured blows of a sledge hammer. The sonorousness of the delivery was somewhat marred by a certain thickness of utterance; but the whole effect was rather imposing, albeit decidedly theatrical.

"I will bandy no further words with you. I command you, on your duty as my son, and at peril of my lasting displeasure if you refuse, to press this matter no further, and to abandon all idea of prosecution, trusting to me to make the best arrangements for your interests. You may take five minutes for consideration; and then say, if you will obey or no." Then the orator resumed his seat.

Paul had not stirred in his chair, nor moved a muscle of his face during that brief declamation: almost before it was concluded, without turning his head or relaxing the steady gaze

that looked straight into his father's eyes, he laid his hand on a bell close to his elbow, and rang it sharply.

"You know Mr. Serocold's house at Clapham, don't you?" he said to his own servant, who answered the bell.

The man assented.

"Take a hansom," his master went on, "and go down there as quickly as you can. You will find two men on the watch, outside. Say to either of them just these words—'Make the arrest at once.' Stay—I'll write them down and sign them. Start at once, and let me know when you come back. I shall be at the club, if not here."

Chetwynde's confidential servant was one of those invaluable menials—rarer than rubies—who set about their appointed tasks, be they ever so novel or strange, quietly and quickly, without remark or remonstrance; who, when business is in hand, never indulge themselves in thinking independently, unless specially ordered so to do. Had Evans not been endowed with this silent discretion he would not have held the

place for ten days that he had occupied for as many years.

He had always heard Mr. Serocold spoken of as a person of the highest repute; not a rumour, of course, had reached him of what to-day had brought forth; yet he went on his way to give orders for the arrest (for he understood the whole thing at once) of that respectable gentleman, just as unconcernedly as if he had spent all the leisure hours of his life in practising as an amateur detective. He did not even bestow a side-glance, before leaving the room, on the Dean's face, as he sate in a huge arm-chair rather without the circle of lamp-light.

Yet that face was worth looking at, to any physiognomist, not easily repelled by expression, but ready to take the rough with the smooth in his studies of human nature.

"That is my answer, sir," Paul said, just as coolly as ever, directly they were alone again.

It is doubtful if the Dean heard the words: he was literally blind and deaf with passion, and too astounded to interfere or prevent the servant's departure.

For many years he had met with more deference from almost every one in anywise subject to his authority, than from his own son. But it had never entered into his brain to conceive that Paul would openly thwart or defy him. Society is wonderfully submissive to men of his stamp; those great bulls of Bashan stamp and stalk about, each in his own prairie, with little let or molestation, unless some rival, equally blatant and blusterous, chances to invade the domain. Perhaps Dean Chetwynde had never been actually bearded since he left college. Tyranny, within doors and without, religious and secular, had become as natural to that man as if he had been born with a hereditary right to despotism. All this made the blow fall heavier now: no wonder that it fairly staggered him, and for the moment shook his moral dignity from her throne.

It would be difficult, even if it were advisable, to transcribe the torrent of foamy invective that burst from his writhing lips when he found voice to speak. But I have too much respect for the most venerable of all institutions, to give

more than the outline of a high clerical dignitary in a state of—let us say—self-oblivion. If the most zealous of the Torrcaster faithful could have looked upon their leader then, their fanaticism would have been cured on the spot: bigotry could not have survived the shame of recognising what a poor weak creature it was that they had so long delighted to honour.

What made the outburst more horribly grotesque, was the Scriptural tone that pervaded it. Scraps of texts were mingled with broken menaces and incoherent abuse; indeed the incongruities somewhat resembled those of Holy Willie's Prayer, only that in this instance there was no hypocrisy of aforethought.

At last the Dean stopped from sheer want of breath. Putting flowers of speech aside, the gist of his invective seemed to resolve itself into the often-repeated question, "How the son dared to forget what he owed to his father?"

No living person had witnessed such an outbreak from Dean Chetwynde; for he kept his temper, as a rule, within decent and dignified bounds; always saturnine and severe, and piti-

lessly fluent in reproof, he was never actually savage. Yet Paul sate through the gust of passion perfectly unmoved; betraying no more emotion or surprise than if he had been listening to the rant of a stage-player.

Yet the first-born was set there, face to face with the sire that begat him—with the priest who sprinkled the water of baptism on his forehead, who taught his baby-lips to lisp their earliest prayer. And these things happened not in the days of Carlos, or Curthose, but in the middle of this severely civilised century; in this land of ours, which delights to keep holy the Sabbath-day; whence, year by year, they go forth by those armies whose mission it is to convert and soften the heart of heathendom.

"Forget what I owe to you?" Paul said in a low bitter voice. "I'm not likely to do that. It's a long score: too long to be paid off on this side of the grave. If my spirit was not crushed in childhood, it was not from the sparing of the rod. You were liberal enough of chastisement, and always had a text to back it with: I never heard you quote that one about 'provoking the

children.' How many kind words or caresses have I to thank you for? I swear—not one. I owe you more than this—a manhood without faith, or hope beyond the world's bounds. It was too late to look for another religion, when you had made me hate and scorn the one that you profess. Is it nothing, that the very words you have been saying would have a holy meaning for others, and sound to me like breaking bubbles of air? Do you wonder at this? Have I not seen you come back from preaching a charity-sermon, and bully your servant for giving a crust to a starving beggar-woman? And you talk about a filial reverence. Bah! There's no one to overhear us: it isn't worth while playing out the farce any longer. I am—what you have made me. An unnatural son—eh? Well, I've learnt to disbelieve in natural affection along with the rest of your creed!"

There was something awful in the suppressed passion of Paul's manner and tone: it told, at once, how many years the sullen embers of enmity had been smouldering before the fire kindled, and at the last he spake with his tongue.

The Dean was fairly cowed: he could only mutter something, between a protest and a refusal to listen any longer. The other went on without noticing this.

"I have more to say: it will be as well to hear me to the end. I am speaking on these things for the first and last time. I could forgive more easily what you have done to me, if I did not know what you have done to others. Have I not seen you grinding the life out of that poor crippled sister of mine; magnifying her small failings into mortal sins, till she is half mad sometimes with terror and remorse, and dare not call her soul her own? Besides this—I loved my mother dearly."

At these last words the elder man raised his head, that had sunk nearly to his breast; a vague fear was mingled with the fury in his bloodshot eyes; and his voice shook a little, though it was hoarse and deep as a tiger's growl.

"What do you mean? Do you dare——?"

He had better have kept back the challenge, or crushed it between his grinding teeth. When Paul spoke again, his face was fearfully changed:

it was, now, far the darker and more threatening of the two.

"What do I mean? I'll soon tell you. I mean just this. I knew all along of the tyranny that drained my poor mother's life away. Have I not lain awake for hours together, because I could not sleep for her sobbing and moaning that came to me through the wall? She never murmured in this world; but I am sure her complaint has been heard somewhere ere this: for I do believe in Eternal Justice, though not as you would teach it. I knew all this: and four years ago, I learnt something more."

Paul's voice sank almost to a whisper, here; but every word was so terribly distinct, that it might have been heard a hundred feet away.

"I know, now, how my mother died, and why Janet was born a cripple."

The colour died away in Dean Chetwynde's face —not gradually, but instantaneously, as it might do in a head that has just fallen under the guillotine: his cheek remained ashen-white, veined and flecked here and there with dull purple.

His mouth opened twice or thrice convulsively, but the dry swollen tongue could form no intelligible syllable: and all the while his great limbs and frame were shaking as in an ague-fit.

After a minute's pause, Paul went on with the same cruel calmness—far harder to bear than virulence of reproach.

"You remember Julie? Of course you do. I don't wonder you got rid of her the day after my mother's funeral. You had better have sent her the alms she asked for to keep her through her last illness. She sent for me to the hospital, and—she spoke out before she died. She told me how she found my mother in a fainting-fit, that evening in the library—ah! I see you've not forgotten it. That long inscription on her tomb in the cathedral says nothing of the push or blow—which was it?—that killed her. Did the doctors guess nothing when they found her in premature labour; nor the dead-nurse when she laid out a corpse, with a black bruise on its breast? I daresay that gentle saint forgave you, if she had strength to speak; and Janet would forgive too. But *I* never will—by the Eternal

God. And you come now to command me to let your precious disciple go free—trusting to *you*, to guard my interests? No—my leading-strings were snapped rather early. You can give him spiritual consolation in prison, if you like; or comfort him with your countenance when he stands in the dock; but you cannot help him, here. Now I have said my say."

If the most vindictive of the many weaklings whom the clerical despot had overborne in his pride of place could have stood in the room just then, the measure of retaliation would surely have been filled to the brim.

It would be difficult to find anything, in earth or heaven, less impressionable than the conscience of a hard, heartless man, who has worn for many years the outer garment of the ascetic. Yet callosity, simple and absolute, is, perhaps, comparatively rare. In the toughest moral hide there may be one gall which will rankle incurably.

The Dean of Torrcaster could look back on the long weary days of his meek wife's martyrdom without a throb of self-reproach; but he

always thought of that single fatal night, if not with remorse, at least with intolerable shame. As he walked up the cathedral nave, his eyes never rested for a second on the little side-chapel, wherein lay a fair white effigy, supine, with folded palms. When he chanced to hear of the French waiting-woman's death, he felt a great relief in the certainty that the black secret would be buried with her. Now—he knew that it had been revealed to the one man alive that he would least have chosen for the confidence. He had found it, of late, very hard to meet, with undisturbed self-complacency, his son's keen, cold eyes: how much harder would it be, now that he could wonder no longer at their animosity and scorn!

On a table, close to the Dean's elbow, there stood a tall glass pitcher of iced water and some goblets. He filled one of these till it overflowed, and drained it eagerly, at a gulp. Slowly and sullenly the torpid blood flowed back into its channels and mounted in his face; but his breathing was still thick and laboured. At last he rose and walked towards the door, staggering

a little and groping his way, like one drunk or purblind.

He paused on the threshold, and facing round, with his hand on the lock, spoke for the first time in a dull, heavy voice. It seemed as if he hardly realised the meaning of his words, but was rather actuated by one of those nervous impulses, which, at certain crises, make a man feel that he must say something, whether it be relevant or no.

"Your blood be on your own head."

"Amen,"—quoth Paul Chetwynde.

It was afterwards somehow tacitly understood between those two, that appearances were to be kept up before the world. Paul still paid brief ceremonious visits to the Deanery. But, in life they were never again alone together.

On what grounds the criminal had ventured to claim the Dean's intercession, was never fully known. When, three years later, the reverend man, stricken suddenly by apoplexy, departed this life in great haste, and intestate, Paul found among the mass of papers abundant evidence that his father had been deeply involved in the

speculations wherein Serocold had sunk other fortunes besides his own. Perhaps there existed between the lawyer and his client a stronger bond than a community of financial interests; and perhaps the latter had been entrusted with something beyond mere professional confidences. But the clue to the possible mystery was never found. Serocold was probably satisfied that the Dean had done his utmost to save him; at any rate, he was not the man to make unprofitable revelations about himself or others. They got little out of him, either before or after his trial; and, when he caught the jail-fever in the second year of his imprisonment, he confessed nothing even in delirium, and died at last as mute and sullen as a bull-dog.

In the dock the lawyer pleaded "Guilty" at once; but asked to be allowed to say a few words, before sentence was passed. He then expressed himself much in the same terms, as in his own chambers, when he so provoked Chetwynde. But he seemed more anxious to claim exemption from the vulgar herd of criminals, than to mitigate or explain away his

actual offence. He wanted to make his case paradoxical and exceptional.

Melancholy to relate, the plain, practical jurymen would persist in regarding Robert Serocold as a very ordinary swindler; and the judge, though his solemn face betrayed no irritation or disgust, confessed afterwards that he was moved by the pietist's self-laudation to double severity of punishment.

END OF VOL. I.

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